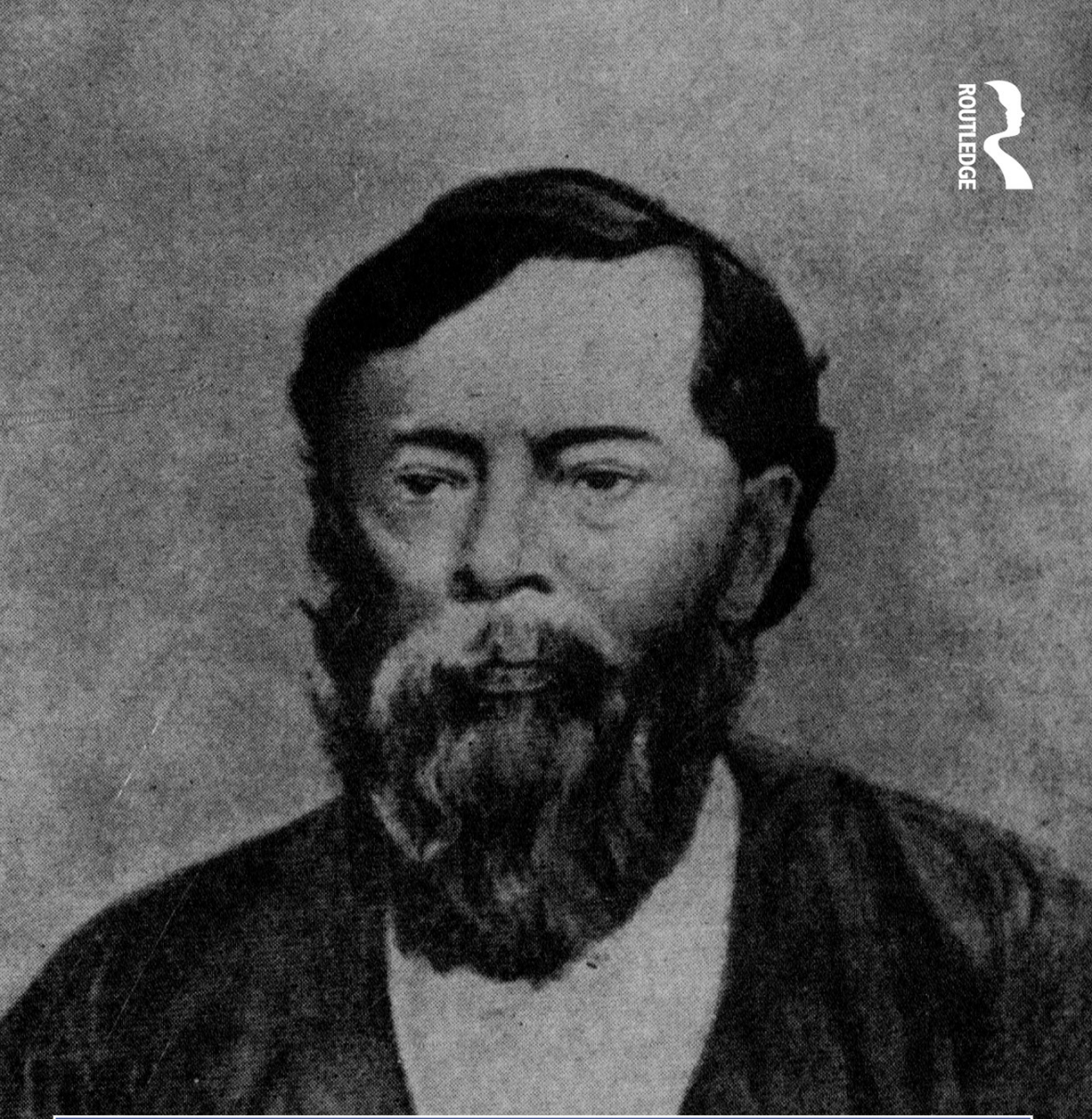

HINDUTVA BEFORE HINDUTVA

SELECTED WRITINGS AND DISCOURSES OF CHANDRANATH BASU IN TRANSLATION

TRANSLATED FROM THE ORIGINAL BENGALI WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

AMIYA P. SEN

HINDUTVA BEFORE HINDUTVA

This book weaves the past with the present to trace and analyze the distinctive but reiterative evocations of Hindutva ideology in the modern-colonial period. It studies the concept of Hindutva as understood by its first major spokesperson Chandranath Basu, a formidable late nineteenth-century scholar-critic. The author examines the new rhetoric that has shaped Hindu ideologies in a colonial-modern context by foregrounding debates between Chandranath Basu and radical revisionists such as Rabindranath Tagore. It provides original translations of Basu's works and brings to light a long-neglected professional literary critic.

A unique contribution, this book will be an essential read for scholars and researchers of religion studies, history, postcolonialism, literature, Indian political thought, Indian history, political science, Hindu studies, Hindusim, sociology and political ideology, and South Asian studies.

Amiya P. Sen retired as Professor of Modern Indian History from the Department of History and Culture, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi. Currently, he is Honorary Fellow at the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, Oxford, UK.

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HINDUTVA BEFORE HINDUTVA

Selected Writings and Discourses of Chandranath Basu in Translation

Translated from the original Bengali with an Introduction by ***Amiya P. Sen***

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For my mamas and mashis of whom, unfortunately, I have seen very little

For those who are willing to set apart

the Hindu zeitgeist *from Hindutva*

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PREFACE

This book asked to be written, if only for correcting my own follies and disabusing interested scholars and readers of some misplaced assumptions about the subject. About 30 years back, in 1993, I had drawn attention to Chandranath Basu's *Hindutva, Hindur Prakrita Itihas* (Hindutva, An authentic history of the Hindus, 1892) and still have reason to believe that I was the first author to do so in a full-length monograph written in the English language. However, at the time this revelation went virtually unnoticed and it was only after 2014 once the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had secured a major electoral victory that there emerged some new interest in the subject. Even so, that interest, one has to say, has remained more ideological in nature than historical. In my experience, polemical battles between competing ideologies are more intense, multiply faster, and attract a wider audience than belabored academic debates.

In continuation with my previous researches and in the light of more recent findings, I am happy to present to the interested reader a relatively unknown but not unimportant figure from colonial Bengal who contributed significantly to the reiteration of an evocative Hindu ideology. The major question that Chandranath poses has to do with the framing of a new interpretative community of Hindus in a modern-colonial context. This is a question that he foisted upon Rammohun's older but very purposive use of the term "Hinduism" to construct a unified community of Hindus, whether real or imagined. Arguably, if there indeed was a conceptual category of Hinduism, it followed that there had also to be derivative, self-defining categories of the Hindu and Hinduness. This task called for both epistemologically and

aesthetically reconstituting the quintessential Hindu and what it meant to be Hindu.

Notwithstanding my previous work on the subject, the social media and distinguished scholars alike nonchalantly assumed, even as late as 2021, that it was Savarkar who had invented that term Hindutva. The tide appears to have turned with at least the Hindu Right showing greater alacrity and awareness in updating its information when compared to the Left-Liberal camp. I distinctly recall watching a video in which J. Sai Deepak patronizingly admonishes Shashi Tharoor for naively attributing the term to Savarkar. As far as I could make out, Sai Deepak took a special delight in invoking the name of Chandranath Basu in the quest of an established genealogy, and the intention here surely was to demonstrate how far back the term was in circulation. This no doubt pleased the Hindu Right which postulates unruptured cultural continuities in the Indic civilization. What most people overlooked here was that the use of the term Hindutva prior to Savarkar is rooted in a discernibly different discourse and a scale of values. It lacked both an unmitigated majoritarian flavor and a radical political edge. It was political in a cultural sense more than the combative and competitive.

As far as lineages go, I am now happy to state that the use of the term Hindutva goes further back in time than what both J. Sai Deepak and I had come to believe. Hence, Shashi Tharoor may now justly draw some consolation from the fact that one who publicly faulted him on facts was himself in error. In this book, I claim that the term Hindutva had entered the conceptual vocabulary of the Hindus by the mid 1880s, if not earlier. Frankly, what also surprised me was its popping up at the most unlikely places. As I shall presently demonstrate, it was a term used even by men such as Rabindranath Tagore who consistently questioned the Hindu mind relapsing into dubious conventions and irrationalities from the past. And it was used by the novelist Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay who articulated an aggrieved and aggressive Hindu worldview without turning communal.

On the basis of my findings, I am now prepared to argue that the relationship between Hinduism and Hindutva is more complex than is generally believed, and further, that Hindu nationalism and Hindutva too are not always interchangeable terms. The former is a much wider and more diffused phenomenon, and there would have to be discursive choices at work suggesting why a particular Hindu nationalist chose to employ the term Hindutva or did not.

Especially since 2019, a lot of misinformation on Chandranath Basu has been circulating in the press and academia. People have taken him to be a son of an affluent zamindar, a disciple of the novelist Bankimchandra, the man who redefined Hindutva using an Advaitic tool, and the first to establish conservative values in Bengali literature. None of this would stand in the face of close scrutiny. Chandranath lived a rather modest middle-class life in

late nineteenth-century Calcutta and remained troubled by mounting family debts incurred on account of a fairly large family. On retiring from service, he requisitioned the government for an enhanced pension, albeit unsuccessfully. He admired Bankim's literary talent and often modeled his writings on his. On the other hand, he also drew upon his friend's writings to express and strengthen his own conservatism. More tellingly, it took him longer to distance himself from the dogmatic, obscure, ritual-laden, pseudo-scientific interpretations of contemporary Hinduism than was the case with Bankim. His work *Pashupatisamvad* (1884) Makarand Paranjape takes to be a survey of contemporary Bengali literature, whereas it was meant to be a political satire which so irked Bankim that he stopped the publication of the journal *Bangadarshan* where the work had been serialized. Chandranath was, for a long time, taken to be primarily a contributor to Bengali prose and literary criticism. I distinctly recall the incident at the National Library, Kolkata, which caused me no small surprise. Upon discovering that I was skimming through his *Hindutva*, the then Director, the late Rabindra Kumar Dasgupta presumed that I had to be a researcher in the Bengali language. I have every reason to be happy to claim Chandranath for history and historians.

Though I have been aware of the literary oeuvre of Chandranath for a long time, working on this remained a challenge, primarily on account of difficulties in accessing his works. In my generation, only a few Kolkata libraries had dilapidated copies of his major works, and more often than not, librarians were extremely wary of allowing readers to handle brittle copies, some of which crumbled at a mere touch. The digital revolution has now made it possible to obtain almost all his works, barring those published the earliest in contemporary journals.

When studying Hindutva, it would be quite misleading to confine one's attention to the 1892 work. What Chandranath took to be the vital constituents of Hindutva are scattered over his several works, and it is important that the researcher employ these gainfully. This is really my third attempt at writing about Chandranath. I am happy to have earlier contributed an article on Basu for the Brill's *Encyclopedia of Hinduism* and on his *Shakuntalatattva,* included in a Festschrift published in honor of Prof. Gita Dharmapal Frick, once my colleague at Heidelberg. While working on this book I have also functioned as a guest editor for a Special Issue of the MDPI online journal *Religions* on the theme "Hinduism and Hindu Nationalism: New Essays sin Perspective". That has made possible greater communication between scholars interested in the subject.

I still rue the fact that this manuscript could not be completed in the pristine surroundings of the IIAS, Shimla. This disappointment arrived at the end of an unsavory experience with the Institute management. The management initially agreed to consider me for the award of a National Fellowship or its equivalent for carrying out this project but subsequently went back on

its word. Perhaps they did not trust me with my conclusions. Having served the Institute for about three years as an editor for their biannual journal, *Summerhill*, I did feel badly let down.

In the course of carrying out this project, I also encountered multiple health issues; first, a fractured writing hand which left me immobile and indisposed for over three months and thereafter, hemorrhage in an eye, resulting in partial loss of vision. I have somehow pulled through these trying times, thanks to some self-belief and encouraging words from friends and family. Amusingly, I still find some consolation in the fact that my subject too struggled with a similar disability for a time.

I would be greatly remiss if I did not acknowledge my debts to Karunamoy Majmdar, Chandranath's only biographer to date in any language. I accidentally came upon this little-known biography at the University of Halle, Germany, back in 2004 and have admired it since for its thoroughness. But for this painstakingly compiled and meticulously researched monograph my own understanding of the life and work of Chandranath Basu would have been considerably poorer.

I am grateful also to the anonymous reviewer for offering some insightful and extremely helpful comments on the manuscript. The reviewer, it has to be said, got me wrong on one point. In this book, it was not my intention to establish Chandranath Basu as the first individual to coin the term Hindutva. On the contrary, I hope to have sufficiently established the fact that it was in circulation even before his time. All the same, Chandranath's *Hindutva,* given the present state of our knowledge, still remains the major contribution to the subject to appear in print before Savarkar's own work of 1923.

With a view to economising on space and to enhance the internal coherence of the text, I have selectively used ellipses to weed out redundant and only tangentially relevant material. This applies to all selections included in this work.

I am thankful to Routledge India for
promptly agreeing to publish this work.

Amiya P. Sen
Gurgaon, 2023

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Part I

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INTRODUCTION

> For a moment pause and ask: what have we left to ourselves? We have lost our political independence, our religion is now under attack, our literature has not yet advanced to the state of excellence of which we may justly be proud. What is it that we possess that might proclaim our distinctiveness as a civilization and instill in us a sense of self belief and pride? On the other hand, what we do possess and which you might rank as superstition and irrational regulations governing our society, I am not willing to let go!
>
> Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay*: Vividha Prabandha (1906)*

> Our ancient and perennially present society is now in a state of quiescence and inertia. The gigantic body with its massive, manly chest is now helplessly rolling on the ground and atop that sprawling supine, lifeless body the dance of destruction goes on: dancing with furious energy and excitement are moral reformers, religious reformers and social reformers!! The task of reform is not to destroy but to reinvigorate that which is dying. Sadly, we excel at this thoughtless destruction but lack the skills to build anew.
>
> Akshay Chandra Sarkar*: 6th Bengal literary Conference, Chittagong, 1913*[1]

The present work represents a renewed engagement with the study of Hindu conservatism in late nineteenth-century Bengal: renewed, because some 30

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years back, I had similarly attempted to understand the life and work of some figures which, at the time, I had chosen to call "Hindu revivalists". Scholarly objections have been raised since that time to my use of the terms "revival"/"revivalist" on broadly two grounds. First, the term revival itself has been found inept as a heuristic category. Contemporary Hinduism was "far from dead", so goes one argument, and hence, it could not really have been revived.[2] Some others, articulating broadly the same objection, have preferred the use of the term "recovery",[3] which, I thought, was quite synonymous in the intended meaning. More misplaced criticism came from those who took the category of revival to be both semantically and historically opposed to reform and to a progressive outlook upon life. In this understanding, revivalism was tantamount to a blind reverence for the past and an attempt to thoughtlessly return ideas and practices of the past.[4]

My rejoinder to the first set of objections has been simply that it was not the dead that could be revived but the dying and that as much of nineteenth-century literature produced in British India suggests, Hinduism and the Hindu way of life were indeed under some duress. This anxiety was quite palpable in the wake of the widow marriage controversy but peaked in the years 1890–1891 when an official move to amend the Indian Penal Code and marginally raise the existing age of consent brought about a near revolt, with even children and housewives taking to the streets of Calcutta in protest, crying hoarse about the "Hindu religion being in imminent danger". Thirty four mammoth protest meetings were convened in the city of Calcutta alone in the year 1891. To the charge that revivalism-represented obsolete, regressive, and antiquated thought and practice, my rejoinder has been twofold. First, revivalism never amounted to the thoughtless replication of the past but careful selection. The task, as I could make out, was far from easy. In truth, the complexity of this exercise even got to the finest of minds in nineteenth-century Bengal. At one place, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894) was persuaded to write thus:

> Let us revere the past, but we must, in justice to our new life, adopt new methods of interpretation and adapt the old, eternal and undying truths to the necessities of that new life.[5]

What struck me about this passage was Bankim's complexly juxtaposing the acts of adopting and adapting. The first suggests Bankim's acknowledging the fact that culture had to keep moving to keep abreast of changing circumstances whereas the second hints at the possibility of cultural change being purposively slackened if not altogether frozen in time. How could that which was timeless, eternal, and undying be adapted to suit changing times? Simply as a matter of definition, could the immutable and eternal also possess the qualities of malleability? The truth here which may not have escaped

Bankim himself was that he was caught between two stools: on the one hand, the strength of a tradition based on perceived fixities and acknowledged antiquity and on the other, the compelling requirement of making life move with time and history. The acuity of this conflict is manifest in his unfinished commentary on the *Bhagavadgita* (posthumously published in 1902) where he deferentially refers to the older commentary by Acharya Shankara, only to argue how the Acharya's commentary on select verses from the *Gita* would be unintelligible and grossly unsuitable for modern times.[6] The point, however, is that Bankim still had to fall back on the idea of a canonical text to press home the idea that the purity and authenticity of a text or tradition were considered directly proportional to its historically established age. And hence the choice of a classical Hindu text like the *Gita*. At heart, this argument reiterated the idea that extremely old civilizations like that of the Hindus were bound to be corrupted over time and hence required to be brought back to their original state of "purity" if at all they were to have a bearing on contemporary life.

That reformers often spoke in the idioms of revival is also borne out by the instance of raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), widely held as India's first modern individual. Rammohun is universally acknowledged as a religious reformer whereas what he was attempting in his own reckoning was a revival. In nineteenth century Bengal, the propagation of Vedanta could not have been come about without an air of innovation given the fact that the province had abounded in the study of Nyaya and Samkhya, both of which were hostile to Vedanta. It subsequently turned out to be a major repository of Vaishnava and Tantric manuscripts but not of the Vedic. Such was the poor state of knowledge of the *shruti* among Hindu Bengali pundits that when Rammohun initiated the translation of select Upanishads into Bengali, his orthodox critics charged him with committing forgery. Rammohun's major argument here was that only the return of Vedanta into public life could ensure the success of his twin modernist agendas: the scrapping of polytheism and of image worship, both of which were allegedly opposed to a rational and non-sectarian religion. The point, however, is that Rammohun consistently denied being an innovator *(adhunik*), arguing that all that had attempted was the return to the "true" methods of pious worship.[7] This sits well with the Hindu world-view that nothing is born *ex nihilio*. As opposed to the Semitic understanding, Hindu Vedanta stood more by the idea of a constructor God who had access to pre-existing material than a Creator God who did not possess these building blocks. As a Vedantin or a follower of the Vedanta, Rammohun's situating himself in the tradition of Acharya Shankara was for reasons similar to Bankim's choosing to engage with the *Shankarabhasya* on the *Gita*. It was a matter of taking stock of the rank and reputation of a man's legacy as generally accepted in the tradition. Both Rammohun and Bankim, though acknowledging their

debts to Shankara believed that they still had the hermeneutic freedom to say things the Acharya would never have said. This suggests that within the framework of colonial Hinduism, the more critical question was not opposition to change or its rebuttal but that of negotiating it along the lines of least resistance. Changes, if they were to endure, had to be delicately grafted upon the interstices of conformity. Even those wary of the challenges posed by European modernity could not have brushed aside the prospects and possibility of reform; their historical location simply forced them to devise suitable means to modulate these to their advantage.

In the present work, my preference for the term "conservatism" has been primarily on account of two reasons. First, over time, I have only grown more aware of the possible interpretative differences between acts of revival and conservation. On a very elementary level, conservatism may be said to prefer retaining the present over bringing back the past; revival, on the contrary, wishes to return to the past since it is dissatisfied with the present. Not all revivalists are conservatives and not all conservatives are convinced that a return to the past will work to their advantage. In the context of colonial India, however, traditionalism was also a matter of injured pride. It could be difficult to separate the two since a conservative utopia may not only want to perpetuate the present but also strengthen it by select references to the past. This combination of strategies was always possible in a people who felt threatened by alien and unfamiliar ways of life introduced under a new political regime. My second reason here has to do with the very social spread and an instinctive deep-rootedness of conservatism, cutting across class, caste, and gender. Allowing for rare exceptions, revivalist postures were best represented by the western educated urban bhadralok whereas a conservative reaction to visible alterations in thought, values, and rhythms of everyday life would be quite natural in even peasants and artisans, the rural gentry, Brahmin scholars and ritual experts and in certain settings, even mothers and housewives. As in the furor that broke out in 1890-91, the demonstrated power of reactive conservatism was based in several nondescript classes: ascetics, priests, petty shopkeepers and brokers, housewives, students, clerks, vendors, and wayfarers. While the aggrieved presence and participation of such classes has been documented, it has still not been possible to socially explain their grievance in any satisfactory measure.

The Many Voices of Hindu Conservatism

In a recent study of Chandranath Basu historian Tanika Sarkar has argued that Hindu conservatism has not yet been adequately studied.[8] Prima facie, this is uncontestable and yet, the statement conceals as much as it reveals. For one, Hindu conservatism was indeed the field of study in my 1993 work *Hindu Revivalism in Late Nineteenth Century Bengal* that ran into

over 450 pages.[9] What is more, to the best of my reckoning, this work was the first, at least in the English language, to treat the life and work of Chandranath and other prominent Hindu conservative figures of the day in any detail. The study included middle class interpreters of neo-Hinduism, traditional pundits and early prototypes of itinerant, English educated Hindu missionaries, the best known of which was no doubt, Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Further, this work alluded, possibly also for the first time, to Basu's 1892 work *Hindutva, Hindur Prakrita Itihas* (Hindutva. An Authentic History of the Hindus). At the time,only a few took notice of the fact that the term "Hindutva" had been used about three decades before Savarkar in a monograph that ran into over 400 pages. To the best of my knowledge this work still remains the only work in an Indian language to explicitly carry such a title. However, the term Hindutva, as I shall presently argue, had entered the conceptual vocabulary of the Hindus by the 1880s and appears in the writing of even such people who were ideologically distant if not entirely removed. This has compelled me to renounce my own claim, originally made in 1993 and reiterated in 2017, about Chandranath Basu being the first to discursively use the term.[10]

Thanks to the digital revolution, I recently gained access to a fairly useful study of Hindu conservatism in nineteenth-century Bengal, written as far back as 1960.[11] This little-known work includes studies of several conservative figures that I have re-examined in this work. In her 2021 monograph, *Hindu Nationalism in India,* Sarkar had affirmed that the term Hindutva had indeed been coined by Savarkar[12], which she justly rectified in the 2022 paper. It is noteworthy though that neither my 1993 work nor that published in 1960 appears in Sarkar's 2022 study of Chandranath, which, not surprisingly, appears exceptionally thin in the matter of citations. The interested reader has virtually no clue as to where Sarkar might have obtained information on Chandranath's mentors like the Sanskritist Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani (1851–1928) and his co-worker, the virulent Hindu missionary Krishnaprosonno Sen (1849–1902). The work also carries certain factual errors. For instance, Sarkar wrongly takes the journal *Prachar* to be founded by Pandit Sasadhar.[13] Nor was he the founder of the Monghyr-based *Bharatvarshiya Arya Dharma Prahirini Sabha*.[14] And while Chandranath certainly did not speak pejoratively of Islam,[15] he was vitriolic in his condemnation of the poet Nabinchandra Sen's (1847–1909) *Palashir Juddha* (1875) for empathizing with the deposed Nawab of Bengal.

> Why is he Hindu remorseful if the Muslims should lose Bengal? And why, if I may ask, does Mohanlal lament? Is it only because he is a servant of the Muslim? And as a Hindu should you not be upset at this?[16]

Basu's letter dated November–December 1896 was written at a time when, following the publication of Bankim's novels *Anandmath*(1882), *Rajsingha* (1882), and *Sitaram*(1884), Hindu-Muslim relations in Bengal had come under some strain.

Finally, Sarkar's study of Chandranath's thought is performed almost entirely from the perspective of a feminist critique and solely hinges upon the work *Hindutva*. A strong patriarchal outlook does pervade Chandranath's writings but does not exhaust the entire range of his discourse. After all, the status of the Hindu women was not the only issue on which Chandranath clashed with his ideological adversaries. Also, as I shall subsequently argue, on certain issues related to women, Chandranath's views were not any more conservative than some of his contemporaries including Bankim. Sarkar does not pause to consider the fact that Basu was the author of over half a dozen books some of which deal with behavioral, moral and philosophical issues concerning the Hindus. Fully upholding Sarkar's observation that Hindu conservative thought needs to be studied more fully, especially in relation to colonial modernity, we might just as well study the subject as much historically as ideologically.

Rather than persist with the study of revivalism, I prefer now to deal with the growth of Hindu conservatism as a phenomenon that proved to be more ubiquitous or widely dispersed. Its social spread was both horizontal and vertical in keeping with the expanding social network of the Bengali bhadralok but also its changing social composition, which, over the years, included many upwardly mobile intermediary castes and classes. The conservatism also deepened and intensified with first, the emergence of some common or widely shared anxieties and second, the visible strengthening of the vernacular press and platform.

However, it was also sufficiently variegated notwithstanding some common elements. As the conservative position crisscrossed with the revivalist, there also emerged, at times, varying emphasis within otherwise related issues. It was only outwardly that Hindu conservatism posed a common front; in reality, it was riddled with inner contradictions resulting from differences in emphases. Restoring a *dharmic* way of life was an agenda which appears commonly upheld by Hindu conservatives but with visible internal differences in understanding and social application. Beyond a point even Sanskrit pundits who joined the conservative camp with little or no knowledge of English, preferred at times to speak in the language of science if only because their middle class, English-educated patrons wanted to hear them speak in such idioms. Some conservative figures, as I shall argue, situated themselves within a Vedantic revival but in the late nineteenth century, Vedanta itself came to be divided into broadly two camps: one that was rooted in the classical Hindu idea of world renunciation and another, which accepted its metaphysical postulates minus its asceticism. As it turned out,

these camps also adopted perceptibly different non-religious agendas. The latter, best identified with Rammohun and the Brahmo community, chose religion as the site of social change; its main objective was to bring forth a reformed religion that would gloss over social tensions which impinged on the idea of common civic nationality. The other, increasingly adopted a more political posture whereby the Vedantic emphasis on the unity of all phenomenon became a source of empowerment. Chandranath begins his *Hindutva* with a Vedantic postulate which identifies man with the cosmos. Interestingly, of the five conservative or quasi-conservative figures that I have primarily discussed in this work (Bankimchandra, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, Rajnarayan Basu, Akshay Chandra Sarkar, and Chandranath), at least two (Bankim and Akshay Chandra) identified themselves primarily with devotional culture and the Vaishnava revival in modern Bengal rather than monistic Vedanta. Both Bhudeb and Chandranath on the other hand, combine a Vedantic worldview with Tantric praxis and for both, this represented serious efforts to re-energize the allegedly effeminate, emasculated, and cowardly Hindu Bengali who ran away from the smallest challenges. Other than Rammohun's biographer, Nagendranath Chattopadhyay, Bhudeb perhaps is the only contemporary figure to insist on drawing attention to the raja's Tantric antecedents. In a series of essays possibly written in the mid-1880s, Bhudeb was to argue that Brahmoism was, in fact, Sanatan Dharma in new garb, purposively born to counter the threat from evangelist Christianity.[17]

The Hindu revivalist was quite likely to be conservative in his thought but the reverse was not always true. It is quite possible to detect elements of cultural revivalism in Rammohun but not conservatism, especially of the kind that came to characterize late nineteenth-century Bengal. On the contrary, he was often charged with violating social and cultural norms by allegedly eating "forbidden food", mixing freely with not a particular Muslim but the Muslim community in general, fabricating Hindu scriptures, speaking of a God with whom most Hindus had grown unfamiliar, but above all for striking at the roots of Hindu patriarchy by aiding an alien government in legally abolishing the cultural practice of sati. The difficulty with a revivalist posture as Rammohun would have no doubt realized was that it called for a degree of modernist selectivity if it was to be of any contemporary relevance. Shankara Vedanta could not have been reproduced in its classical form since it called for several exclusions. It rested on a highly textual culture and privileges confined to the ritually highest caste. On the other hand, a reformed religion seeking to return the adoration of a True God would defeat its purpose by remaining socially differentiated. To be more meaningful it had to be accessible for all and yet, this struck at the very roots of tradition. Rammohun's opponents would have been clearly in the right had they accused him of a double jeopardy. In the first place, the raja had chosen to comment on no more than five Upanishads whereas even his *parama guru*, Shankara, had

commented on as many as ten. Such selectivity clearly distracted from the truth that the Upanishads spoke with many voices and hence open to conflicting interpretations. The choice of texts here was clearly aimed at internal consistency. Second, his claim that there was indeed an identifiable body of belief or practice that could be given the name "Hinduism" also called for the creation of an interpretative, more cohesive community of believers. So pressing was this task that Rammohun did not pause to consider if his translation of esoteric texts into the vernacular, no doubt a radical innovation in itself, could at all be relevant or intelligible even to the traditionally literate classes, not to speak of the quotidian. It is only fair to assume that like the educator Pundit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891) after him, Rammohun expected virtuous knowledge to progressively percolate down from a literati to the masses. The Pundit's emphasis, if any, was really on secondary education, not primary.[18] Though associated with the revival of Vedanta in modern India, Rammohun eventually emerged as a figure who was more modern than a Vedantin. Also, he did not so much "modernize" Vedanta as choose to propagate elements within it that were amenable to modernity. Surely, this was what the conservatives, including the English educated among them, wished to avoid, not simply to escape the charge of innovation but more on account of the belief that European modernity was not something that could be successfully replicated in India. Some among them like Chandranath Basu, the focus of our study, even doubted the temporal sequence of tradition and modernity, claiming that rather than one succeeding the other they could both coexist in time.

In nineteenth century Bengal, conservatism was a ubiquitous phenomenon which is not to suggest that everyone who mattered in public life was innately conservative. On the other hand, elements of conservatism were present in most, barring very few exceptions. This conservatism could be manifest in several forms. It could exist simply as spontaneous resistance to an alien and unfamiliar culture; as a reaction to perceived threats to the existing social order, as some compensatory mechanism for perceived loss of power and authority or a pathological distrust of rapid or radical change. To such people Reform Hinduism would have felt like some cultural betrayal. Conservatism also had its base in objective material changes occurring in everyday life: consumerist inroads into an essentially subsistence economy that fed on paltry clerical budgets, growing problems of securing a livelihood, a sense of psychological abuse inflicted by official highhandedness and racialism but not least of all, in an as yet unexplained turn towards religiosity. The last is particularly important since conservatism often emerged in the wake of invigorated religious consciousness. In renascent Bengal, rational, scientific interrogations did make their presence felt from time to time but were never as powerful or pervasive as a religiously articulated sense of interiority, of shifting one's attention from an understanding of the phenomenal

world to an inward gaze upon the self and the immediate family. This was to be specially manifest in Chandranath but even Bankim claimed that cultural specificity could not always be expressed in some universally applicable human language. That in the case of Hindus this specificity was most vitally defined by religion is an argument that was consistently articulated in late nineteenth century Bengal. That the Hindus were the most religious people on earth was an argument also commonly heard at the time.

The conservative position made matters relatively simpler, first, by narrowing down the mechanism of choice making as also by more explicitly infusing a greater sense of willful resistance within acts of cultural exchange. I am persuaded to argue that a congenial environment for this was created by certain structural changes occurring within Hindu Bengali society. For one, there was the visible expansion in the social base of the bhadralok. Defense of culture and everyday conventions now came to rest more with the Brahminical classes than solely with the Brahmin. Thanks to the efforts of Vidyasagar, even the ritually marginalized Suvarnabaniks could now gain entry into the Sanskrit College and some, like Adharlal Sen (1855–1885), Bankim's friend, were nominated to the rank of Deputy Magistrate. One of the interesting developments that began to occur in Bengal by the mid-nineteenth century was social power perceptibly shifting to the numerically stronger and more influential upper bracket (but non-Brahmin) classes, who, thanks to the success of comprador trade and profitable investments in land, were quicker to emerge as social leaders and cultural leaders and publicists. I have elsewhere argued that Vidyasagar's plans to regularize Hindu widow marriages without some supporting legislation were actually defeated by the Calcutta *dalapatis* (community leaders) of the day, only one of whom was a Brahmin.[19] Ever since the agitation around the issue of sati, non-Brahmins more than Brahmins had taken the position that social behavior was governed more by prevalent custom than shastric prescriptions. This objection makes sense given the fact that non-Brahmins were in no position to interpret *shastras* and their power essentially grew from conformity to normative behavior. Brahmins, on the other hand, did not take kindly to attempts made by non-Brahmins to alter the social order in their favor. The orthodox Brahmin Maharaj Krishnachandra, of Nadia, was peeved not only by the Baidya Raja Rajballav trying to get his widow daughter married but also to claim Vaishya status (and hence the right to put on the sacred thread). A status quo-ist position with respect to everyday Hindu life thus strongly emerged under these conditions, aided of course by emerging threats from lower-caste dissensions as with the Chandals/Namasudras. Radical challenges from below naturally forged a greater unity among upper castes than was possible on an intra-Brahminical level. A complaint consistently lodged by both Brahmins and upper bracket non-Brahmins was the imminent threat of sons of peasants and artisans competing with the bhadralok for clerical

jobs. It was a non-Brahmin author who argued that opening up esoteric knowledge of the Hindus to lower castes would directly imperil the livelihood of the Brahmin and investing such classes with sacred thread would lead to the virtual dissolution of the Hindu social order.[20]

Just as Hindu conservatism originated in several discrete yet overlapping concerns, it also expressed itself in various forms. In hindsight, one could attribute this to two reasons. To an extent, this depended on the degree of familiarity that each of our figures had with Western currents of thought and on the degree to which they were able to creatively engage with it. In some cases, this was confined to a functional knowledge of English with little or no interest in the larger social and philosophical discourse produced in the contemporary West. The intellectual engagement was somewhat contrived, given the fact that it was primarily used for polemical purposes. Chandranath Basu was reasonably well-read in contemporary English (and European literature to the extent it was available in translation) but his objective, more often than not, was to use internal ideological dissensions or disagreement within Western scholarship to strengthen his critique of Western ways of life. For instance, he used some of the satirical works of the English novelist, William Hurrell Mallock (1849–1923) to his advantage. Mallock did not think that religions could be founded on scientific data and that they were more securely based on commonly shared dogma. Similarly, strengthened by Mallock's *The New Paul and Virginia* (1878) and *Is Life Worth Living* (1879). Chandranath and quite a few of his contemporaries, including Bankimchandra, were drawn to the conservative side of Auguste Comte (1798–1857) as for instance his denial of voting rights to women, discouragement of second marriages which some of his Hindu followers interpreted as a taboo on widow marriages, his willingness to concede inequality in the social order, and a scrupulous regulation of dietary habits. Like Chandranath, Bankim eventually grew wary of Positivism, primarily for its refusal to accommodate a theistic notion of God. On the other hand, he cared little for theories that forged connections between vegetarianism and an exalted spiritual life. Even in the mid-1880s, by when he had emerged as a spokesperson for Hinduism and aggressively contesting Christian evangelist charges of even English-educated Hindus playing up to idolatry, Bankim portrayed himself as a Vaishnava mendicant who was willing to feast on an appetizing dish of fowl curry![21] Around the same time, Chandranath had emerged as the staunchest advocate of a refined and purified vegetarian diet for the Hindu, and this pushed him into a protracted controversy with the poet Rabindranath Tagore.[22]

Chandranath tried to follow in the footsteps of Bankim when it came to an interest in comparative literature.[23] Effectively, however, he remained tied to the task of proving the superiority of Kalidas over Shakespeare and demonstrating how female characters from Shakespearean plays would prove to

be unworthy models for bringing up girls in Hindu homes. Bankim could be no less critical of Western social theories, especially of Utilitarianism, which he once compared to sheer hedonism.[24] And yet, he had the grace to admit that as a theory it could not be dismissed outright. Bankim disputed the Indological knowledge of F. Max Muller (1823–1900) and went back on his earlier belief in social egalitarianism. On the whole, though, he was still the man best read in the annals of Western knowledge, convinced that the Hindus lacked in certain mental qualities that had contributed to the intellectual and material progress of the West. Among these, he included the powers of observation and experimentation, the capacity to argue inductively but above all, the failure to pay adequate attention to the world that lay outside the self. Chandranath's forte, as earlier argued, was in some respects its very opposite. Eventually, this explains his failure to bring greater sociological depth into his writings. On one level, this is surprising since the man who most influenced him, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894), was the author of the first serious sociological treatise on contemporary Indian Society.

Inadvertently or otherwise, Bankimchandra blazed the trail for conservative theorists like Chandranath and several others in certain respects. Primarily, this was related to the status of the Hindu woman and wife. Bankim did not particularly recommend early marriages for girls but believed that child brides made excellent life partners. He himself testifies to the conjugal happiness he found in marrying women considerably younger in age. In general, he remained wary of Europeans misconstruing the spirit underlying Hindu manners and customs as for instance, the custom of men marrying multiple wives. This is the ground on which he discouraged the translations of his popular novels *Bishbirkkha* (1873) and *Devi Chaudhurani* (1882). He disagreed with Vidyasagar's campaign to put a legal embargo on polygamous marriages commonly found among upper caste men. Here Bankim's objections were two- fold. First, he took women related reform to be carried out in undue haste but more importantly, from an innate distrust of reformers acting in cohort with an alien bureaucracy. The problem especially with the latter was that they did not adequately familiarize themselves with the Hindu way of life nor make a serious effort to understand it. This objection acquired a stronger conservative edge over the role played by non-Hindu "zealots" like Behramji M. Malabarii (1853-1912). For Bankim. Malabari wielded a two edged sword since he was simultaneously trying to remove the restraints of an "enforced" widowhood and raise the marriageable age of Hindu girls. Of these, the first issue was of particular importance to Bankim. One of the leading female characters in his novel *Bishbriksh* can be seen to doubt the erudition of Vidyasagar himself for having found scriptural support for widow marriages! More tellingly, in his works of fiction no widow who commits the transgression of falling in love with a man or marrying him lives to tell her tale. The commonplace argument that reformers employed to

rationalize widow marriages was that when left to their fate, most widows turned scandalously lecherous and unfaithful. This was a charge that particularly irked Bankim and other men of his class since it sacrilegiously dismantled the image of the Hindu widow as the very embodiment of virtuous purity, endurance, selflessness and impeccable chastity. Chandicharan Sen, a Brahmo *munsef* from Krishnanagar once argued that in his experience, 99% of all Hindu widows were unfaithful.

Bankim answered this with biting sarcasm.[25]

Chandranath lacked both the literary finesse of Bankim and his ability to present a more nuanced view of things. He did not possess either the probing interest or the analytical powers to closely examine the changes occurring within the domestic economy of the Hindus; the new consciousness that schooling, new curricula, and the relatively greater gender mixing was bringing about particularly in the girl child from middle-class Hindu homes. Bankim had reflected on these questions in an essay titled *Prachina Ebong Nabina* (The New Woman and the Old), published in the journal *Bangadarshan*, sometime in 1879. Interestingly, the collected works of Bankim include three offended responses from correspondents who signed up as women subscribers to the journal. On the other hand, it is not unlikely that the three respondents were men writing on behalf of women or under false identities. Bankim's own essay to which I have referred above carries distinctly conservative overtones. It accuses the new woman of turning careless and indolent, averse to performing their household chores, and brusquely forsaking older values and conventions.[26] In hindsight, it has to be said that the first of these charges subsequently became an instant favorite with writers more conservative than Bankim himself and whose wrath especially fell upon the *Brahmika* or the educated Brahmo woman who was ever so dependent on the services of domestic workers, all too eager to flout established conventions when it came to gender mixing and an easy victim to alluring consumerism that had already entered urban Bengali life. A greatly concerned Chandranath was to vividly portray what global capitalism was doing to urban domesticity and petty clerical livelihoods in colonial Calcutta.[27]

Dharma, Divinity, and Didacticism: The Birth of a Conservative Utopia

Chandranath Basu's emergence as a spokesperson for Hindu conservatism coincided with the growth of three overlapping ideological currents, fairly powerful by the 1880s: a strong cultural turn towards valoring the Hindu past, a conservative and at times even reactionary backlash against effecting any significant changes in the conduct of everyday life, and the birth of new religiosity which sought to more meaningfully locate ways of bridging the transcendent and the temporal. The strength of Chandranath's discourse

came from the fact that in some ways, he was able to integrate all the three in his life and work. His literary oeuvre covers a renewed engagement with the past, albeit selectively, a dour defense of the traditional Hindu social order even at the cost of sounding obsolete and outdated, and a pressing concern for making better sense of the mysteries of creation and human life on earth. The first represented a tool that he most effectively borrowed from the hermeneutic enterprise of Bankimchandra. This represented an acute attempt at redefining one's cultural world within a new argumentative framework. As with Bankim himself, this redefinition of paradigms came with a conscious change of linguistic and literary strategies. Bankim, no doubt, was the more gifted figure who modernized and made more supple Bengali prose, experimented with new categories of thought, and raised literary creativity to a higher level of sophistication. The important thing here was that Bankim, even when dealing with the old, had new things to say. By comparison, the less gifted Chandranath sounded archaic and at times even tautological when it came to interpreting the past. More often than not, his tendency was to somehow locate new relevance in the old and to perpetuate existing conventions. Even in the somber literary and cultural mood of late nineteenth-century Bengal, these looked a trifle contrived. Chandranath's disadvantage here was that though blessed with a keen literary sense, he could not, unlike Bankim, give expression to his inner feelings or imagination through works of fiction. For him, cultural truths and coveted ideals had to be expressed in didactic prose, not left to poetic imagination.

On the subject of man-woman relationships, affirming the wife's obligations to the husband or the disavowal of widow marriages, Chandranath's conservatism was no greater than that of Bankim. On the contrary, it was Bankim's works that he cited when drawing attention to the disastrous consequences following a woman's refusing to fall in with the husband's wishes.[28] Arguably, the conservative elements in Bankim's writings gained greater social circulation given the fact that his novels, originally serialized in the *Bangadarshan*, had a growing readership including a good number of female readers. In such social and domestic locations both liberality and conservatism could turn into intense private feeling that readers consciously mulled over. On the other hand, unlike Chandranath, Bankim never resorted to publicly expressing his feelings on the allegedly "disturbing" trends developing in man-woman relationship. This made him a relatively smaller victim of polemical attacks. What provided the extra conservative edge to Chandranath's thoughts was his active engagement with public forums that cogitated on sensitive issues affecting contemporary Hindus as for instance, a propitious age for Hindu marriages or the ideal Hindu diet. His writings on these subjects originally appeared as public speeches. Also important was his penchant for combining a defense of conventional patriarchal culture with somewhat antiquated notions of the everyday life of the Hindus. It was

his insistence on Hindu marriages being essentially spiritual in character or vegetarianism promoting greater spiritual growth that drew him into a protracted controversy with Rabindranath Tagore.[29] Bankim acknowledged the power of sensual human love but frowned upon romantic feelings developing outside marriage; Chandranath more categorically warned against the socially damaging consequences of extra marital love. At several places in his novels Bankim speaks of how the bewitching beauty of women often drew forth the male gaze and this allowed for both human emotional fulfillment and the dramatic quality in his novels. In Chandranath, such male vulnerability was but a weakness or indiscretion that led to far reaching consequences. In his *Dharmatattva* (1888), Bankim speaks of the devotion due from the wife to the husband that was analogous to a man's reverence for God but says practically very little on the ideal age of the wife in relation to the husband.[30]

The ordering of Hindu conjugality within the domestic economy of the Hindus and just how the newly wedded Hindu wife would best avoid maladjustment with the husband and the extended family are issues that Chandranath almost entirely borrowed from Bhudeb's *Paribarik Prabandha* (Essays on the Family, 1882) which was the first of the trilogy that Bhudeb produced between 1882 and 1895.[31] His *Garhasthya Paath* (Readings on Domesticity, 1883) and *Shanjam Shikkha* (Lessons in Self-Control, 1904) are also modeled on Bhudeb's writings. As a self-indulgent man who had his moments of excesses, Bankim would have been hard put to abide by the taxing regulations that Bhudeb posited for the Hindu in his works. Over time, Chandranath himself came to enjoy an authority and reputation on matters pertaining to the powers of the community and the defense of social conventions. In 1903, Basu was invited to write a Foreword to a book on Hindu domestic manuals by a Brahmo woman writer based in Cuttack. Significantly enough, barring the issue of discouraging widow marriages, the author was in ready agreement with Basu's recommendations. Her only dissenting point was that if the bereaved husband got to marry a second time, so should the widow, if only for the sake of avoiding a life of extreme self-denial, neglect, and misery.[32]

Other than Bankim and Bhudeb, Chandranath Basu was also deeply influenced by the life and career of the sanskritist Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani. Pundit Sasadhar's rise to fame was meteoric since historically, he appeared at an important cusp in Bengali social and cultural life. It was a time when racialism as manifest over the Ilbert Bill controversy, rising unemployment of the educated Hindus and bureaucratic highhandedness of the type that Bankimchandra had complained of in his *Bransonism* and *Muchiram Guder Jeeboncharit*.[33] It was also a time when, added to the ignominy of leading a petty, poverty stricken clerical life, the pride of the Hindu had been also ruffled by direct attacks on his cherished values and

notions of sacredness. In 1883, on the insistence of a white judge, a Hindu icon (*Shalagram Sila*) had to be brought to the court, an act that was widely taken to be an affront to the religious sentiments of the Hindu community.[34]

The Pandit was a scholar of *Nyaya* (school of logic and disputation) and *vyakaran* (grammar) and in his early life, greatly depended heavily on the patronage of affluent landholders and middle-class professionals. The class character of his following changed once he quit the life of a missionary and preacher in north India, catering to the needs of small town gentry. Pundit Sasadhar arrived in metropolitan Calcutta sometime in 1884–1885 where his lectures and discourses caught the attention of a wide array of middle-class Hindu Bengalis. These spoke of things that such classes were keen to hear: the "reckless neglect" of traditional values and ways of life but also specious theories that founded Hinduism on quasi-scientific principles. No less important is the fact that Shasadhar appeared at a time when both Calcutta and Bombay were rocked by issues relating to the status of the Hindu woman and wife. At least in Bengal, the orthodox opposition to the Widow Marriage Act had considerably tarnished the image of the reformer and practically made a mockery of the Act itself. Nineteenth-century Bengal had the highest number of Hindu widows but celebrated far fewer widow marriages in comparison to other provinces of British India. Equally, serious and disturbing questions regarding the propitious age of marriage for Hindu girls had also been made public. On balance, the latter appeared to have more far-reaching implications since it touched upon two fundamental questions affecting the domestic life of the Hindus: it had a bearing on the survival of the Hindu extended family or so most people thought, and it was closely linked to the necessity of fulfilling certain ritual and social obligations on the part of parents for their unwed daughters. Hindu orthodoxy in Bengal prided itself on the custom of *gauridaan,* the custom of gifting a daughter in marriage when eight years old but the prospects of a daughter remaining unmarried even on attaining the age of puberty simply condemned the erring father to excruciating suffering in hell.

The 1880s were indeed characterized by a new middle-class Hindu religiosity that was founded on older beliefs but also revolved around certain contemporary concerns and questions. It avoided both the mystical abandon of popular religion as well as its socially radicalizing qualities of modern religious reform. There was to it a sense of religious materialism that would have looked attractive to several classes of men who were keen to make greater sense of their everyday existential problems in the light of traditional knowledge. The new feature in this urban religiosity was its acceptance of the normal routines and rhythms of life without having to make palpable shifts or adjustments. The crowning point, however, was the emergence of the new, accessible urban guru who could not be pinned down to a particular spiritual lineage, made no pressing demands on his followers,

listened patiently to the recurring trauma or travails of subaltern existence and suggested astonishingly simple ways of bringing relief to their troubling lives. In the mid 1870s and early 1880s, such a figure was Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886), a saint who spoke in enchanting rural parables that nonetheless unraveled the deepest metaphysical mysteries. He preferred piety to philosophical quibbling, suggested that there was indeed some deeply illusive and incomprehensible quality about the world and that a life of detachment produced greater personal happiness and fulfillment than when chasing material success. He also suggested that seeking God was indeed the highest objective before man and that of all life forms that inhabited the world only man was capable of God remembrance.

In hindsight, it may be justly claimed that this religiosity, which, unlike what some neo-Hindu thinkers and reformers had been creating, did not call for altering the structure of existing social relationships. It rejected not the world itself but gross worldliness; rather than shun material concerns or calculations, it suggested that these be transmuted to spiritual quests. Most of Ramakrishna's devotees or disciples would have been relieved to note that unlike the Brahmos, he did not insist on iconoclasm, forsaking caste rules, or scandalously promote common prayer meetings for men and women. The saint insisted that a sense of modesty was the chief defining quality in women and that a son was obliged to discharge their duties to parents before taking to private pursuits. He warned equally against avarice and temptations of the flesh; he assured the old and the infirm about an untroubled afterlife, reminded the housewife that her liberation lay in faithfully serving the husband and his extended family. In substance, the everyday discourse of Ramakrishna strongly argued against reform and innovation without appearing to do so. This was a conservatism that hinged on the theory that there was indeed something enduring, redemptive, and rewarding in adhering to traditional Hindu social and cultural life.

Ramakrishna's discourse fulfilled yet another important function from the perspective of contemporary middle class religion. His well-known eclecticism considerably strengthened the already emerging view that Hinduism was the most tolerant and accommodative of religions. This was to considerably enhance the Hindu bhadralok claim that shorn of its excesses, Hinduism was the noblest of religions which actually had the potential of becoming a universal religion for mankind. Prima facie, this universalism looks implausible especially when born in cultural conservatism since, generally speaking, conservatism was more likely to be culture specific than universalist in its ideological orientation. In the nineteenth century Bengal, however, their boundaries were palpably blurred. As early as 1829, Rammohun had authored a tract called The *Universal Religion* but which almost exclusively drew upon Hindu Brahminical sources. In 1849, a journal published from Calcutta made the claim that all religions were, in

fact, reflected in Hinduism.[35] Bankim himself was to speak of the Hindu's *jagatik preeti* (love of humanity) which he took to be a defining quality of Hindutva. In his *Hindutva*, Chandranath includes a fairly lengthy essay on *maitri* (fraternity).

After Rammohun, the growing concern with restoring older ways of life also produced the flowering of devotional culture. On one level, this is symbolized by the turn from an obsession with Gnostic Vedanta as had been the case with Rammohun and the Orientalists, William Jones and Henry Colebrook to neo Puranism inaugurated by H. H. Wilson's turning to the study of Puranas. The greater architect of this bhakti revival was Bankimchandra himself with his bold new reading of the Krishna legend in the *Krishnacharitra* (1886). The bhakti revival at once raised two key questions within the framework of Hindu cultural nationalism: the role of the affective in raising and consolidating the skeptre of nationalism and second, the validity of Hindu image worship. Retrospectively speaking, it is safe to argue that Bankim had a role to play with respect to both these questions. Further down this essay, I shall attempt to demonstrate that the conservative elements within Hindu nationalist thought contributed meaningfully to flatten the older debate over conflicting conceptions of God and His worship. A tract published in 1856 accused Europeans of turning the Hindu mind away from the richness and spontaneity of Puranic religious content and symbolism.[36] With Bankimchandra, the success of the affective element in both articulating political passion and harmonizing Hindu cultural thought was visible by the 1880s. In the novel *Anandamath* Vaishnava mendicants are seen to sing to the glory of the Mother-Goddess, clearly a Sakta conception.[37] By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, this new spiritual angst had imparted a greater sense of human participation, intimacy, and emotive content to contemporary Hinduism. It ought not to be overlooked that their iconoclasm notwithstanding the Brahmos were among the first to convert to Vaishnava bhakti ecstasy which relied heavily on image worship. They also pioneered the revival of *Nagar Sankirtan* which made public expressions of collective bhakti possible on the streets of Calcutta. Even for non-Vaishnava nationalist leaders, such ecstatic exhibitions of feeling carried hidden symbolism. There were soon suggestions to the effect that the medieval Bengali saint Srikrishnachaitanya (1486–1533) by defying state orders prohibiting kirtan processions had demonstrated the power of civil disobedience against an unjust alien rule.[38] In his *Dharmatattva,* Bankimchandra was led to say that orienting all human actions, feelings, or dispositions toward God constituted bhakti and that this devotional fervor for a Higher Being was the defining quality of man (*manushatya*). In hindsight, this appears no different from the pious teaching of Ramakrishna who, too, was valorizing the path of bhakti for the common man but which was not without its political resonance.

By the third quarter of the nineteenth century, it also emerged that a reformed religion alone would not suffice in securing a more aggressive, self-assured, and cohesive identity for the Hindus. It was now felt that changes made to patterns of speculative thought had to be backed by new sociological thinking that suitably reformulated the behavioral aspects of Hindu life. An argument common to late nineteenth-century Hindu thinking was that if the Hindus lacked in any quality in comparison to the European, it was the power of effective organization. This eventually gave birth to two parallel streams of thought which also converged at places. One of these originated in the educator Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay and the other, in Bankim himself. The first typically articulated in the work *Samajik Prabandha* (Essays on Society)[39] rested its case on the primacy of the *samaj* or the community in relation to the individual. From this perspective, modern reformist impulses were seen to originate only in individual idiosyncrasy, not the sanctity of collective will. A perceptibly different yet not unrelated theory came through Bankim's *Dharmatattva* which suggested that meaningful changes began only with a critical self-examination. Even so, Bankim's objective was to arrive at the notion of some common good and civic responsibility. The *Dharmatattva* begins by asking about ways to alleviate human unhappiness but the conquest of individual unhappiness had still to serve the larger purpose of effecting social harmony. Neither of these views addresses the question of personal liberation (*moksha*) with any seriousness. For Bhudeb, the community itself was embodied divinity (*devsharira*) which gave it both a sacred and imperishable character.[40] Here Bhudeb may have been subconsciously drawing parallels between *religio perennis* (*sanatan dharma*) and a perpetual community life that could survive all temporal and outward changes in polity or economy.

Bankimchandra was aware of the multiple meanings of the term Dharma and of the fact that more often than not, it was related to given contingencies or contexts. And yet, he chose to use it in a normative and monistic sense, comparable perhaps to Rammohun's earlier tactical use of the term "Hinduism". The paradox here is that Bankim had himself disputed the use of such a synoptic label for something as diverse and differentiated as Hindu belief and practice.[41] Even so, he accepted the idea that a religion had to rest on a discernible definitional axis and if, as he himself repeatedly asserted, religion was in essence social culture, there still remained the question of identifying what that was. It would have been easy for Bankimchandra to settle on the term "Sanatan Dharma" which had the dual advantage of securing both a sense of antiquity and fixed values. Here the element of fixity was important since it seemed to offer a convincing answer to the puzzle as to why Hindu civilization had managed to survive whereas other mighty civilizations of comparable vintage had crumbled with time. On the other hand, Bankim was far from comfortable with the idea of a culture frozen in time;

it was this that led him to question the anachronism in Dayanand's *Satyarth Prakash*.[42] As Bankim somewhat tendentiously took Dharma to mean religion and since he also maintained that "in principle religion was the philosophy of life and in practice the rule of life",[43] this forced him to come to the conclusion that while the principles of Hinduism were immutable, the modes of their application varied with time and changing circumstances. This also compelled him to make a statement that would have been widely accepted by the Hindus at the time. It was a statement that would have done even the most conservative elements in contemporary Bengal proud:

> The great principles of Hinduism are good for all ages and all mankind[44]

In hindsight, it would appear as though Bankim had only carried forward a trend that had been developing especially since the 1840s after the initial impact of the Derozian rebellion had somewhat weakened. Dharma soon became an important site for Hindu hermeneutics: it was emblematic of a new self-understanding for the Hindus.[45] Between 1840 and 1890, there were no less than 13 Bengali journals that carried the term "Dharma" in their titles.[46] Bankim's own *Dharmatattva* was preceded by titles which sounded similar even when differing in content. One of the early works in this field was Loknath Basu's *Hindu Dharma Marma*, published in 1856, reprinted in 1897.[47] In 1863, the Brahmo-rationalist Akshaykumar Dutta (1820–1886) published the *Dharmaneeti,* a manual that included instructions on how best to run the domestic economy of the Hindus on *dharmic* lines.[48] In 1864 and 1872, respectively, Keshabchandra Sen launched two important journals aimed at propagating the essentials of Brahmodharma, the *Dharmatattva* and *Dharmasadhan*. A work with similar aims was the veteran Brahmo leader Rajnarayan Basu's *Dharmatattvadipika* (1866).[49]

The Hindu conservatives answered back, initially through Indranath Basu's *Hinduharmaneeti* (1872)[50] and subsequently with *Dharmavyakhya* (1884) by Pandit Sasadhar.[51] The latter was supported by the hugely popular and conservative *Bangabasi Press*. It was originally meant to be published as a multi-volume work with as many as 60 parts. For reasons not clear to us, publication of this work stopped with the first volume which included only five parts. The *Dharmavyakhya*, in a sense, was built upon arguments earlier articulated in *Hindu Dharma Marma* but with far greater cultural rhetoric added. For instance, it claimed that the complete man was to be found among the Hindus alone,[52] that it was the pursuit of Dharma that provided lasting happiness[53] and that the conservation of national feeling (*jatiyata*) and safeguarding social conventions (*samaj raksha*) were also the most significant functions of Dharma.[54] In essence, these claims were not inconsistent with those made by Bankimchandra himself but for the fact that the general flavor of Sasadhar's obscure rhetoric displeased him.

Bankim's understanding of the term "Sanatan", for instance, was closer to postulating a collection of some core cultural values rather than a paradigm that could not be measured by time. The more conservative among his compatriots treated the term in a far more inclusive manner. Bankim's friend and fellow writer Akshay Chandra Sarkar defined it as a term encompassing, territory, nationality, language, social rites, ritual, ceremonies, and customs. Importantly, this also meant that each of these components had to be protected and preserved in order that Dharma itself may be left insulated and intact.[55] The underlying conservatism of the message rang sharply through time. In 1909, Sri Aurobindo was to echo this sentiment by suggesting that Dharma encompassed all that pertained to the individual, the race, the community, and the age.[56]

At the time when Pundit Shasadhar began his lecture tours of Calcutta, the *Dharmatattva* had just begun to be serialized in the journal *Nabajeebon* and not much noticed in bhadralok society. Far more attractive was the vivacious oratory of Pandit Sasdhar. Each time he spoke from some public platform, the Pandit summoned an impressive number of Hindu texts in support of his arguments, ranging from the *Dharmashastras* to the epics and Puranas. The immediate effect of such cultural nativity was benumbing. By comparison, some readers of Bankim were discomfited by his copiously citing Kant, Schleiermacher, Seeley, Tylor, Mill, and Mathew Arnold. Such was also the case with his *Krishnacharitra*. It would have shocked many to hear Bankim claim that the figure of Radha was pure fiction or that the more "authentic" Krishna belonged to the *Mahabharata* tradition and not that of the *Bhagavat Purana*. To such people, equating religion with "the substance of culture" did not sound very Indian.[57]

It was Chandranath who arranged a meeting between Bankim and Pundit Shasadhar so that they might deliberate on the complex and many layered meanings that lay hidden behind the term Dharma. But whereas Bankim recoiled at the very ritualistic and doctrinal view of Dharma as presented by Pundit Shasadhar, Chandranath's reactions were more sedate and unquestioning. What he may have particularly liked about the Pundit's exposition was his ability to combine a metaphysical understanding of Dharma with a sharp critique of the burgeoning neo-Hindu discourse. Part V of *Dharmavyakhya* was devoted to the scrupulous detailing of an ideal Hindu diet and the performance of yogic acts which, reportedly, cured and strengthened the body. For Shasadhar, India was already culturally dead, having thoughtlessly aped English thoughts and habits. The educated, anglicized Babu was in his opinion, only "sub-English" in character.[58]

At the time, however, a xenophobic reaction to Western religion and culture was more sharply articulated by Pundit Shasadhar's co-worker and Hindu missionary, Krishnaprosonno Sen (later Krishnananda Swamy) but that reaction arrived closer to the years 1890–-1891 when Calcutta was

seized by the agitation against the proposed age of consent bill. Ironically enough, some followers of the Pundit found him much too pliable and naively catering to what the Babu was keen to hear. Fellow Sanskritists, for example, objected to his efforts to explain the superiority of "Hindudharma" with recourse to the idioms of modern science. They cynically labeled it as "Anglo Vernacular religion".[59] What also impressed Chandranath was the Pundit's categorizing religion into the "natural" and the "emotive" categories. Hinduism, in this view, was a natural religion and did not assume the form of a creed as had Christianity and Islam. Natural religions counted more on self-disciplining and personal efforts at salvation than on soliciting Divine Grace. God in the Semitic tradition could be merciful but also cruel and capricious, demanding absolute obedience. Since natural religions paid greater attention to individual efforts they also treated the world and worldly life as a spiritual training ground that enabled man to prepare for a higher spiritual life. Incidentally, this was exactly the view that Chandranath's mentor Bhudeb was to express in his *Samajik Prabandha* and it is no surprise that both these figures took to the path of Vedanta. In modern Indian thought, the persistence of Vedanta is indeed surprising; it would be an error to think that the tradition weakened after Rammohun until revived by Swami Vivekananda. What may have also appealed to Chandranath was the tendency visible in both Pundit Shasadhar and some of his own co-writers to invest Dharma with an all-encompassing, totalizing Power that bridged the temporal and the transcendental. Akshay Chandra Sarkar, for example, strongly upheld the idea that Dharma governed both worldly life and the next.[60] It was Dharma that conserved or sustained the entire range of human experiences and also gave these meaning.

Chandranath has left behind for posterity his initial response to Shasadhar:

> As he (Pundit Shasadhar) explained to us, the root of the word Dharma is "dhri" or that which holds and sustains. At that moment, my mind was at once cleared of all doubts. However, it also occurred to me that if that which this universe holds be separated from the Lord of the Universe Himself, the Lord can never be located by us. Should we somehow separate creation from its Creator the world can only destroy us and not protect us. This Truth that had eluded me for several years was finally before me. My joy knew no bounds.[61]

In truly Vedantic fashion, Chandanath's *Hindutva* opens with an essay on the Vedantic *mahavakya* "Soaham" (That I am), hinting at the underlying unity of all phenomena. A nagging concern for what befalls man after death pervades his several works. One could hazard the guess that at some point in his life Chandranath may have been drawn to Theosophy with its abiding interest in spirit experimentation. There is, however, no direct evidence to

support this. I am inclined to think that with him, thoughts about afterlife were a part of his personal upbringing as a Hindu.

Hindutva: A Modern Cultural Aphorism?

In classical Sanskrit literature, there has been a common tendency to condense in aphoristic form (*sutra)* lengthy and complex formulations of social, grammatical, or philosophical "truths". Thus we hear of the *Brahma* or *Vedanta Sutra, Grihya Sutra, Dharma Sutra, Mimamsa Sutra, Yoga Sutra, Samkhya Sutra,* and the like. Sutra literature comprised a distinct genre of literary production in early India and its functional value arrived in two mutually contradictory qualities. On the one hand, this allowed compression which was of practical value, especially given the need for effectively disseminating a tradition across space, time, and cultures. On the other, the compression itself left ample scope for conflicting interpretation as is evident from differing interpretations of a common text like the *Brahma Sutra*, each of which came to represent a distinctive philosophical school. Paradoxically, therefore, condensation also paved the way for expansion and amplification.

It is my understanding that at some point in time, modern Hindus increasingly felt the need for a term that represented purposive cultural abstraction. The term "Hinduism" coined by Rammohun in 1816 was in itself an aggregated term, and reflected the growing need to formulate a new interpretative community in the context of the modern-colonial. Subsequently, Vedanta too was seen to encapsulate the cumulative religious and philosophical wisdom of the Hindus. Even at the World Parliament of Religions at Chicago (1893) Swami Vivekananda was at times heard to use the terms Hinduism and Vedanta interchangeably. The awkwardness of this claim was obvious within a decade after Rammohun's death when his successors in faith questioned the veracity of the very textual sources on which Vedanta was founded. The charge then laid at the door of contemporary Brahmo leaders was that these sources spoke with many voices which was not quite the way a religion was construed at the time, especially for the western educated. In its early history, Hindu reformism appears to have been based on a monochromatic view of transcendental reality. Neither God nor religion could be divisible. Arguably, Rammohun tried to bring in some form of spiritual democracy by suggesting that women and Shudras, classes hitherto denied access to esoteric knowledge of the scriptures, would also be entitled to this. What the raja overlooked was that for a highly textual tradition like Vedanta to be so disseminated, a far higher level of mass literacy would have been required, if not also a shared cultural and philosophical interest. Rammohun's somewhat loose use of the term Vedanta could not distract from the fact that it was a particular set of Vedantic thought that he was representing and not a synoptic view of the Upanishads on which this school was based. Rammohun's

spiritual successor, Maharshi Debendranath Tagore (1817–1905) was rather horrified at the way Shankara Vedanta which is what the raja was advocating, collapsed the distinction between man and God. Rammohun also had a deep-seated distrust of popular Hinduism which he took to be suspect on grounds of both the quantum of knowledge and moral bearings. At one place he gives us to believe that people rejecting the Vedantic wisdom of Shankara had to be mere weavers or else fishermen by profession. The sensuality reflected in Hindu idols and the way this allegedly made common women morally vulnerable when inhabiting sacred spaces worried him.[62]

By the 1860s and 1870s, Brahmo nationalists themselves were among those to question theological exclusions at a time when a corporate Hindu identity was being progressively framed. By this time, the National Mela, originally conceived as a pan-Indian organization, had openly taken on a Hindu character[63] and quite significantly, Brahmos took a lead in effecting this change. Rajnarayan Basu's tracts *Hindu Dharmer Shresthata* (1872) and *Briddha Hindur Asha/ An Old Hindu's Hopes* (1887–1888) give voice to this concern, first by downplaying the doctrinal debate between the *sakarvadis* and the *nirakarvadis* that would roughly correspond to the Brahmo-Hindu divide on the question of image worship. Importantly, the unity of all Hindu religious texts was now openly proclaimed, suggesting that Hinduism, rather than be rooted in the Vedas (*shruti*), had also to respectfully consider post-Vedic texts (Smriti, Itihasa, Puranas, and Tantra). This was an argument with far-reaching implications. For one, this realistically acknowledged the composite and plural nature of Hinduism but also its acclaimed underlying unity. Prima facie, this would have looked strange coming from the Brahmos since accommodating the Puranas meant overturning the reformist objection to Puranic symbolism, mythology, and ornate image worship. Additionally, accommodating Tantra meant turning a blind eye to bhadralok puritanical inhibitions which took Tantra to be no more than free gender mixing and secret nocturnal orgies. Particularistic religious affinity, in fact, took a back seat in this scheme of things since even those among the English educated who had reputedly lost faith in Hinduism were now invited to join the association of patriotic Hindus. Even so, older cultural and social anxieties did surface at certain points as is evident from the provision that while women would be allowed to attend meetings, public spectacles of song or drama rendered by women remained strictly prohibited.[64]

An identity based purely on religion remained problematic also on account of perceived sectarian animosity or differences. From that perspective, an identity based on common ethnicity or culture looked easier to handle. While Shakta religious culture could still remain discernibly different from the Vaishnava culturally each would acknowledge the other as born of the same womb, based on certain common manners, customs, or habits of the mind. These cultural commonalities could range from a taboo on beef

eating, the observance of caste rules, and early betrothals of the girl-child to observing certain rites of passage, joining annual pilgrim trails-, or participating in common festivals. It occurred to those attempting to forge this new corporate identity that doctrinal particularities could be partly overridden by something as commonly recurring as negotiating recurring life and death or reflecting on issues of karma and rebirth. On the mental plane, the Hindu zeitgeist reminded people that it had been an old habit with them to locate elements of unity and continuity even amid glaring diversity and stormy change.

Hindutva, then, was a cultural code, which, though never fully divorced from a religiosity or religious consciousness, now allowed wider channels of social recruitment and mobilization. Hinduism was still viewed as an orthopraxy and not an orthodoxy but this choice itself came to reflect a rang of choices founded on a powerful, albeit inchoate organic unity. It suggested other ways of defining a Hindu, combining methods of both inclusion and exclusion. Even though Hinduism could not always be defined with precision, Hindutva or Hinduness opened up new luminal possibilities. The concept was seen to comprise qualities that made the Hindus distinctive as a people. As a term Hindutva did sound abstract and cryptic and yet, paradoxically, there was now a greater interpretative freedom.

(ii)

With an eye on the extant literature on the subject, three fundamental questions need to be asked pertaining to the formulation and application of the term Hindutva. First, there is the question linked to the history of the term itself. Was it coined and purposively used only by the 1920s, as has been claimed for a long time? Second, since they share a common prefix, could the terms Hinduism and Hindutva be used interchangeably? Third, is Hindutva only another name for Hindu nationalism? Scholarly opinion has differed sharply on each of the three issues and the debates show no signs of abating.

One of the objectives of this book is to establish the genealogy of the term Hindutva. That the term had been used as early as 1892 by a Bengali literary critic and made the subject of a full-length monograph had been established over thirty years ago[65] but at the time, as I have earlier argued, this went practically unnoticed, primarily because the term had not acquired the political gravity and resonance that it has of late. The BJP's electoral successes after 2014 produced a plethora of critical studies on the subject, most of which assumed that the term was both invented and put in circulation by Vinayak Damodar. Savarkar (1883–1966) in the 1920s.[66] Among the half a dozen or more studies that emerged on the subject, not more than a couple paid adequate attention to the historical and cultural context within which the term had originated and come to be used even earlier. Chetan Bhatt, to

use an apt instance, had somewhat speculatively but rightly argued "that the nineteenth century developments could well have provided the long heritage that the twentieth century claims".[67] Jyotirmaya Sharma has recently presented us with a study of three nineteenth-century figures (Swami Dayanand Saraswati, Swami Vivekananda, and Sri Aurobindo) as a kind of prelude to the understanding of Hindutva.[68] However, there emerge two difficulties with this argument: first, to the best of my knowledge, none of the three nineteenth-century figures is known to have used the term Hindutva and second, that the three figures being studied in relation to Savarkar amounts to a visible flattening of the perspective. It is assumed, for instance, that the ideas or strategies of the four figures possess an internal coherence, continuity, and comparability. In this work, quite evidently, Sharma also uses the term Hindutva and Hindu Nationalism interchangeably which, as I shall presently argue, can be problematic.

Over the past two years my researches have led me to significantly revise my own opinion on the genealogy of the term. I am now prepared to say that the term Hindutva had entered the conceptual vocabulary of the Hindus by the early 1880s, a good many years before Chandranath Basu himself produced his magnum opus. There may be cause to revise my opinion yet again in the near future but based on the evidence that I can summon at this time I am prepared to claim that outside Bengal, it was first used in 1884 by Lokmanya Tilak (1856–1920) in his journalistic writings.[69] In the context of ethnic Bengal itself, its earliest known use occurs in the novel *Anandamath* (1882) by Bankimchandra.[70] About six years later, in 1887-88, it was used simultaneously by Rajnarayan Basu[71] and Bankimchandra.[72] The latter especially surprised me since Bankim's attitude on a restatement of contemporary Hinduism differed in some important respects from both Chandranath as also other contemporary figures. In this group, as indicated earlier, we may justly include Bhudeb Mukhopadyay, Pundit Sasadhar, and Akshay Chandra Sarkar. Bankim's discourse, it also has to be said, varied from that of Rajnarayan Basu when it came to defining the Hindus and Hindu nationalism. Following Bankim, the term was used by Brahmabandhab Upadhyay[73] in 1901–1902 and several times by Rabindranath Tagore between 1895 and 1912.[74] While it is quite possible that Savarkar may have known of Tilak's use of the term, it is highly unlikely that he was also aware of the regularity with which it was being used in contemporary Bengal.

The trouble with deconstructing the term Hindutva is that it allows for multiple meanings within a common conceptual framework. In 1887–1888, Rajnarayan Basu categorically listed five determinants of the Hindu identity which he took to be the basis of Hindutva. First, there was the ethnic qualification of belonging to the Aryan stock but this, in his view, would also include tribes like the Santhals who had been acculturated and co-opted within the community of Hindus. The second qualification was reverence

paid to the epics, Puranas, and to the mythology and religious symbolism that they exhibited. Third, the language associated with Hindutva had to be Sanskrit or any language derived from Sanskrit. Fourth, a Hindu had to bear a personal name that was rooted in the Sanskrit language. Finally, Hindutva, reportedly, was based on a distinct metaphysical principle which required the adoration of one Absolute Reality (*Parabrama*) or else any designated god or goddess. Of these, the last is particularly intriguing since coming from a Brahmo theologian, it made absolutely no sense to put common gods and goddesses on the same pedestal as the indivisible metaphysical Absolute. Arguably, this would have turned Brahmo reformism on its head, ignoring its consistent and sharp attacks on idolatry and Hindu polytheism. For Rajnarayan, apparently, these differences had now to be glossed over in the interests of a composite Hindu ethnic and cultural identity.

Around roughly the same time as Rajnarayan, Bankim resorted to the use of the term Hindutva but to denote a very different preference or value. In the work *Dharmatattva* the guru declares that without adopting a universalism and an expansive love for humanity (*jagatik preeti*) Hindutva would simply cease to exist. Bankim also uses an analogous word, "Hinduani" to suggest an essentially Hindu social culture.[75] What subtle difference he located between the two terms is not clear and yet, it is worth speculating if Bankim resented the pejorative use of the term made by Muslim state officials against local Hindus. In the Vaishnava hagiography, *Chaitanya Bhagavata* of Vrindavan Das, the Kazi of Nadia indeed uses it to ridicule the burgeoning Chaitanya cult which made devotional singing or dancing a public spectacle.[76] Even as a proto-Vaishnava theorist, Bankim was not particularly devoted to the cult of Chaitanya but Vrindaban Das's reporting may well have caused him some offense.

In his classic study of renascent Bengal, *Nobojuger Bangla,* Bipinchandra Pal identifies the universalism in Bankimchandra as the redeeming quality in neo-Hindu ideology. In this view, rather than be insular or exclusive, Bankim attempted to reconcile patriotic love of the country with a humanist concern for all mankind. Quite ironically, Pal's argument appears in the context of Bankim's most debated novel, *Anandamath,* where Bengal's Mother Goddess is shown to be seated on the lap of *Mahavishnu*, representing Humanity.[77] In the context of a novel that drew its energy from a critique of Indo-Muslim rule and hatred for Muslims in general, this argument might be prima facie difficult to sustain. On the other hand, Bankim's mission was to unite the Hindus as a community (*jatiyata*), not suggest the prospects of a Hindu state (*rajya*) as would be borne out by his two succeeding novels, *Rajsingha* (1882), and *Sitaram* (1887). In the context of the nineteenth century, Hindutva was about constructing a Hindu nation, not a locus of state power.

Brahmabandhab Upadhyay, a Brahmin convert to the Catholic faith, joined militant politics and wrote regularly on subjects related to Hindu religion and culture in the period immediately preceding the anti-partition agitation in Bengal. Two of his writings from this period which specifically use the term Hindutva stress the behavioral aspects of a reconstituted and consolidated Hindu identity. The first of these published in the summer of 1901 speaks of "one centeredness" (*eknisthata)* of the Hindu race. The point to be noted here is that Upadhyay took the Hindus to be a distinctive and readily identifiable community converging around a common ethnic origin and cultural self-understanding. The idea of *eknisthata* appears to echo an argument that Rammohun had once used in the context of Hindu scriptures. He spoke of the *ekvakyata* (a concept borrowed from the *Mimamsa* school of Hindu philosophy) or unity of all scripture when in truth there was very little. Contrary to what his spiritual successors were to claim, Rammohun had insisted that "….the explanation of the Vedas and of its commentators must either be admitted as sufficiently reconciling the apparent contradictions or not be admitted at all".[78] A second essay by Brahmabandhab that followed roughly a year later elaborated on this postulate. In Upadhyay's view, what gave the Hindus unity and solidarity as a community was the caste order. This echoes the view, also articulated by some contemporary Hindus that the Hindu sense of unity was more a matter of conforming to certain social norms or prescriptions rather than religious belief. So long as a Hindu remained within the bounds of his caste, a change of faith did not make the slightest difference. A work published around the same time as Chandranath Basu's *Hindutva* puts this argument quite forcefully, adding that it was this social order that had prevented large numbers of Hindus being lost to Islam.[79] In Bengal, demographic worries about the diminishing number of Hindus began to be heard soon after, even from people who never directly empathized with the Hindutva lobby. When interviewed by Sister Nivedita (1867–1911) on the "bounds of Hinduism", Vivekananda reportedly felt that "every man going out of the Hindu pale is not only a man less but an enemy the more"[80]. Such concerns affected Tagore over 30 years later. Writing to a close correspondent, Hemantabala Devi, Tagore expressed the fear that the Hindus might be humbled by the Pathans yet again with the descendents of the Bhatpara Pundits being forced to read the *Kalma*![81]

There is an uncanny resemblance between Savarkar's assertion that Hindutva represented not simply a word but an entire history[82] and the title to Chandranath's 1892 work which quite exponentially suggests the same. It is highly unlikely that Savarkar borrowed the idea from Basu for the simple reason that *Hindutva* was not translated until now and may not have been in great circulation nation wide. It is also equally unlikely that the brief notice of Basu's book that appeared in the *Calcutta Review* some two years later caught his attention. There seems to be no simple explanation for

just how Basu and Savarkar converged on a common idea except to suggest that this idea had an ideological circulation, the history of which is still to be unearthed. At this point it would be relevant to state that in nineteenth century Bengal, a host of writers, Chandranath included, did not consider Hinduism to be an adjunct of Hindutva.[83] Also, Hinduism, in this view was not simply the "ism" of the Hindus.. If anything, the opposite appears to be the case.

In the nineteenth-century Bengal, perceptions about a relationship forged between Hindu nationalism and Hindutva appears to have traveled along diverse routes. There is indeed a case for subtly separating Hindutva and Hindu nationalism if only because not all Hindu cultural ideologues or Hindu nationalists preferred to use the term Hindutva. On the other hand, some who did use it would have been rather unhappy at being called Hindu Nationalists. Rabindranath Tagore used the term around 1911–1912 by when his novel *Gora* had sharply critiqued the excesses of Hindu insularity and chauvinistic nationalism. This conclusion appears to be supported by the fact that there was no fixed meaning attached yet to the term Hindutva, leaving some room for nuances and semantic play. Remarkably, while the term was in vogue by the 1880s, it had not gained any noticeable currency given the general preoccupation with redefining Hinduism or the Hindu way of life during the period. To that must be added the fact that at least in Bengal, its use visibly dropped after 1912, apparently never to regain its strength.

Arvind Sharma has drawn attention to the controversy that goes on interminably between scholars on the matter of locating differences between Hinduism and Hindutva, and evidently, his argument rests on treating Hindutva and Hindu nationalism synonymously. Reportedly, Hindutva has been called "Hinduism on steroids", the "Hinduism that resists" and as the "illegitimate child of Hinduism".[84] Evidently, Sharma's understanding and use of the term Hindutva is based on the post-1920 ideology of Savarkar and not its nineteenth-century antecedents. The wedge that Sharma somewhat synthetically places between "Hindu liberals" and "Hindu nationalists" opens up further room for doubt. Sharma argues that while the "liberals" take a milder view of Indo-Muslim rule as against the British-colonial, the opposite is the case with the "nationalists".[85] My study of late nineteenth-century Bengal suggests otherwise. Several Bengali writers, including Chandranath would scarcely fit this formulation. If anything, Basu's *Hindutva* is an intense cultural critique of both European values and public lifestyles and remains singularly bereft of any reference to Muslim rule or of the Islamic civilization as a whole.[86] Even more serious exceptions appear in the case of figures whose conservatism was several shades deeper than that of Basu himself. My reference here is to both Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay and Akshay Chandra Sarkar. Bhudeb felt that Hindu-Muslim unity was

eventually bound to occur in India, and here, his argument was based on the high percentage of Hindu converts to Islam in Bengal. Reportedly, the average Muslim he met on his many travels knew more about Hindu heroes from antiquity than the history of the Caliphate. Bhudeb also takes some delight in arguing how Wahabi machinations to popularize beef eating among Bengal Muslims proved to be a dismal failure.[87] In his work *Pushpanjali* (1876), the Mother Figure, Adhibharati, treats Hindus and Muslims alike as her children. On the other hand, the entire work is an allegorical treatment of the culturally debilitating, extractive and exploitative nature of British colonialism.[88] In an interesting experiment with counter-factual history, Bhudeb depicts how, at the battlefield of Panipat, Ahmad Shah Abdali agrees to hand over the political fate of Hindusthan to the Marathas, promising never to return. This is followed by jubilant scenes of a grand fraternal embrace of Hindu and Muslim chieftains at Delhi's Jama Masjid.[89] Rajnarayan Basu was to attempts something even more spectacular. In his *Ascharya Swapna* a (A Strange Dream, n.d.), the British colonial masters are seen to leave Bengal, give up eating beef and Oxford prefers teaching Bengali to Englishmen in lieu of English![90] In the 1880s, Sarkar was to repeatedly warn his Hindu compatriots that in a province where about half the population was Muslim by faith, it would be disastrous to sow discord between the two communities,[91]

Nonetheless, there are some distinctly aberrant voices too. There were voices that were drawing closer to the idea of a Hindu led Indian nationalism and the flattening of Indian pluralistic culture. Rajnarayan Basu, for instance, believed that while a political alliance of Hindus and Muslims was always possible against an alien rule against which both communities nursed certain grievances, this would not necessarily pave the way for a composite Indian nationality. The names of Bhima and Arjuna, he candidly argues, could not be possibly combined with those of Hassan and Husain and though the Semitic races were just as God fearing as the Hindus, they were doctrinally different and did not worship the same God.[92] Akshay Chandra critiqued the idea of equating "Bande Mataram" with the invocation to the Motherland not because this sounded culturally prejudiced and partisan but because this nationalistic icon was unfamiliar to the true Hindus themselves! Bankim, in his view, had simply clothed a Hindu deity in the colors of Pax Britannica! The Muslims, after all, would never agree to forsake an invocation of Allah.[93] Basu himself complains of a surfeit of "Indian-ness" unduly overtaking "Hinduness". Allegedly, a 'false cosmopolitanism' had consumed the souls of the educated Hindu and that called for corrective measures. Somewhat in the manner of what Tilak had been advocating in Maharashtra, Rajnarayan simply gave up on the idea of uniting the two communities outside pure political expediency:

> How can the two nations amalgamate together? But if they (the Muslims) embrace the same fait (as the Hindus) and adopted common manners and customs, the amalgamation can take place.[94]

On one level, this is not radically different from Savarkar's notion of Hindutva but for the fact that Basu does not employ the concept of India as the holy land (*punyabhumi*) to exclude Muslims as citizens. With him, it was a concept that imparted the sense of sacredness to the nationalist utopia. Arguably, Rajnarayan was speaking of a common political aim and concerted political efforts but this very much rested on Muslims agreeing to become instrumental to the Hindu majoritarian project.

Further down this essay I shall briefly refer to the views of Vivekananda and Akshay Sarkar, both of whom are known to have employed the term *punyabhumi* without also using it in an exclusionary sense. And there were sane voices even among people who prided themselves as Hindu nationalists but declined to make this nationalism exclusionary. Guruprosad Sen, to whom we have earlier referred, strongly asserted that India was not the country of Hindus alone. His argument, however, takes a perceptibly different turn as when he says that a greater solidarity between Hindus and Muslims would be facilitated by ensuring greater unity within the Muslim community.[95]

To some, inter-community assimilation looked eminently possible; In his *Samajik Prabandha*, Bhudeb would have us believe that but for the Parsis, all other religious communities inhabiting India could trace their ancestry to the Hindus.[96] Not surprisingly, therefore, the regeneration of India ultimately rested on the regeneration of the Hindus and of Hinduism. This is an argument articulated by Rajnarayan Basu[97] and Bhudeb[98] but also by Bankim[99] who, had once denied that India was a country of Hindus alone.[100]

Under the circumstances, it becomes difficult to agree with Jyotirmaya Sharma who finds virtually no difference between Hinduism and Hindutva. He then makes the further claim that Vivekananda had to be the "father and preceptor of Hindutva".[101] This argument, commonly made even earlier, has been ably contested by Anantanand Rambachan who demonstrates how, for Vivekananda, Hinduism was ultimately spiritual in character and that this clearly distanced it from Savarkar's Hindutva.[102] In 1897, upon returning to India and addressing a large crown assembled at Madras, Vivekananda made two points of substance. In the first place, he was happy to note that the swelling crowd at Madras had gathered to felicitate not some charismatic political leader but a "begging sanyasi". Following this observation the Swami advised people in the audience to make religion the "backbone of national life".[103]

My objections to the predominant view on the subject today are twofold. First, the thesis that the terms Hindu nationalism and Hindutva are

unqualifiedly interchangeable and synonymous is open to doubt. However, I would also express my reservations against the contrary view that these can be categorically separated. While there is just cause for placing a conceptual divide between a softer, more abstract notion of pre-Savarkar Hindutva and the distinctly exclusionary and politically loaded ideology of the years after 1920, these are not without their subtle overlaps of intent or strategy. The ideological configurations in the late nineteenth century, one has to admit, are palpably more complex than commonly imagined. For one, these are not politically innocuous.

There is little reason to doubt that Vivekananda contributed to Hindu nationalism and that some of his arguments were to considerably reinforce the ideology of Right-Wing Hindu nationalists of the early twentieth century. However, in all fairness to the Swami, it has to be said that such nationalism still remains short of visualizing a Hindu majoritarian political order which excluded a substantial percentage of the Indian population from active citizenship. With Hindus of the nineteenth century, both social conservatism and culture-based nationalism were complexly intertwined, widely diffused, and ideologically penetrating. Rammohun's Universalism did not keep him from upholding the "superiority" of Hindu spirituality even when it was reportedly lacking in moral fiber when compared to Christianity.[104] But more tellingly, the raja also found Hindus less reprehensible when it came to treating other religions with disdain and cruelty, as was allegedly the case with Islam or else perpetrating wanton violence and bloodshed as allegedly did the Christians.[105] Vivekananda appears to have latched on to the older idea, articulated by his guru, Shri Ramakrishna, that all modern religious experiments were bound to flounder with time, leaving only Sanatan Dharma to endure.[106] The Swami himself was to claim the following:

> As for religious sects—the Brahmo Samaj, the Arya Samaj and others have been useless mixtures: they were only voices of apology to our English masters to allow us to live.[107]

What he proclaims elsewhere looks to be a precursor to global Hinduism:

> Typically the word Hindu covers not only Hindus proper but also Mahommedans, Christians, Jains and other people.[108]

For a man who otherwise had high regard for the compassion of the Buddha, Vivekananda blamed Buddhism for infusing habits of passiveness, indolence, and lethargy (*tamas)* in the once energetic and vivacious Hindu. Like the early followers of Christianity, he alleged, the docile Hindus learned to turn the other cheek when slapped on one. It was indeed a pity that while the active and vigorous European temperament rejected

Christianity, the descendents of the warrior god Krishna wrongly took to the ways of the docile Christ! It was Christ who had undone the glories of the Greco-Roman world just as the Buddha was to do for the Hindu civilization.[109]

A scheme for an aggressive Hindu cultural expansion on a global level was part of Vivekananda's oeuvre. Claims about Aryan Hindus colonizing a substantial part of the world had already been suggested in some of Rajnarayan Basu's early essays. One of these, dating back to 1865, speaks of how the Aryans had successfully colonized and won over to the Hindu way of life several tribal communities in India, the inhabitants of South East Asia, and possibly even the Americas.[110] People whom Vivekananda had met in the course of his early wanderings as a sanyasi in India recalled that the Swami entertained grandiose dreams too:

> My ambition is to improve the world by Hindu thought, to see Hindus everywhere from the North Pole to the South Pole.[111]

Two significantly innovative expressions that Vivekananda coined in his lifetime were to have far-reaching implications. One of these was "Practical Vedanta" and the other, "Aggressive Hinduism".[112]

The idea of a Hindu homeland appears to have struck some pre-Savarkar Hindu nationalists quite forcefully. The concept of a *punyabhumi* as I have earlier hinted, was purposively used by Rajnaryan Basu,[113] Akshay Chandra Sarkar,[114] and Swami Vivekananda.[115] In all three cases, the sacredness of the idiom comes from a subtle joining of the concepts of dharma and karma. Jyotirmaya Sharma, however, appears to read this wrong when he argues that contrary to preceding usages, the Swami used the expression *punyabhumi* in a civic-secular sense.[116] Prima facie, this meaning cannot be ruled out in the case of an individual who rather extraordinarily interpreted Karma Yoga as pure altruism, bereft of any reference to God and religion. On the other hand, interpreting "karma" itself as essentially dharmic activity is already preempted in Rajnarayan Basu.[117] In this view, the world was a moral gymnasium and worldly work prepared the individual for higher spiritual goals. Also, there was really nothing secular in Hindu culture as the nationalist leader Bipinchandra Pal was to state,[118] echoing an older argument from Bankimchandra.[119] This meant that the cry of "Bande Mataram" amounted not to the invocation of the Motherland but of an embodied Spiritual Mother:

> The real cult of the Mother among us is part of our general spiritual culture. It is the true idealization of the collective life and functions of our society … our love of our land and people is an organic part of our ideas of the love of God … and not a mere civic sentiment.[120]

The joining of the two concepts was not without its underlying problems. For one, it produces a sense of ambiguity. Sarkar, who was otherwise keen to uphold the religious character of the national regeneration, also recalls the instance of the Chinese who had shown far greater urgency to protect their territorial integrity than their religion. That too was high patriotism, Sarkar reminds us. On the other hand, it was simply galling that the Jews lacked a homeland of their own.[121] Given the complexity with which ideas were formulated, it ought not to surprise us that even the most die-hard Hindu conservatives claim that differences in nationality or religious culture could always be subsumed under a common national objective. Consistency was not always the strong point within nineteenth-century conservatism.

> If it not be your intention to somehow dupe the Muslims into somehow help you carry out your private political designs, do ensure that you are both initiated in the same mantra. You should either get them to drop their "Allah hu *Akbar*" in favour of "Bande Mataram" or else take to singing the name of Allah yourselves.[122]

(iii)

Where do we situate Chandranath Basu within the complex and variegated mental world of the Hindu bhadralok at the cusp between the nineteenth century and the twentieth? Nearly two years after it was published, a brief review of Chandranath's *Hindutva* appeared in the *Calcutta Review*. Although misleading in some respects, the review got two things unquestionably right. First, it noticed how the work avoided the pitfalls of both combativeness and apologia and second, that it was essentially about the loss and recovery of the Hindu self under conditions of extreme cultural duress. True to the spirit of writers who had earlier used the term Hindutva, Chandranath took it to represent a kind of *communitas* that made possible the interpenetration of historical experience and a cultural utopia. In this he was wistful, nostalgic without being reactive and self-righteous. Chandranath carried a penchant for the traditional but tradition, in his understanding, was capable of speaking in the language of modernity. The two features of Western society that he consciously avoided were, first, the tendency to wholly accept a man centered universe and its accompanying certitudes and, second, the Enlightenment trope that tradition and modernity had to be always temporally separated. He was a gifted writer who used his literary talent to circulate his social theories and a social theorist who believed that enduring identities had to be built upon a pressing conformism to commonly agreed norms. In his time, he was one among those who believed that Hindu social articulation needed new categories of thought, emanating in modernity but a modernity that was anchored in self-belief and cultural autonomy of apolitically truncated but justly proud race.

The Rise of a Conservative Star

Chandranath Basu was born on 31 August 1844, in village Kaikala, district Hoogly, subdivision Srirampur, West Bengal. His grandfather, Kashinath Basu, a man of modest means but respectable lineage, had two sons. Of these, the younger, Sitanath, fathered Chandranath, his younger brother, Dwarkanath, and three daughters, Suradhani, Mandakini, and Bardasundari. Nothing more is heard of Chandranath's siblings; they simply fade into near obscurity. Presumably, they stayed back with the extended family at the native place at the time, the girls would have been married off fairly early and Dwarkanath may have been forced to spend the rest of his life in the rural setting of Kaikala. Chandranath himself never speaks about them though intermittently recollecting his boyhood days in the village. His autobiography, a part of which is excerpted in this book is almost exclusively centered on himself and his immediate family.[123] In all, Basu was to spend more than half a century in the city of Calcutta with very short stays at distant Jaipur, Cuttack, and Dhaka.[124]

In Chandranath's time, Kaikala was, by all appearances, a fairly prosperous village, inhabited mostly by Brahmins and Tantis (weavers). The prosperity came through local trading in cotton yarn and loom products. It was also a reasonably healthy place until hit by the ravages of malaria in the 1860s. Going by Chandranath's own recollections of his childhood days, there was considerable harmony and goodwill between various communities settled in the village. At the conclusion of the autumnal Durga puja festivities, even upper caste boys would customarily make rounds of the ritually defiled Bagdi and Muslim homes and be generously treated with delicacies. It was the gradual erosion of this spontaneous warmth, hospitality and innocence that Chandranath most bemoaned as an adult.[125] In his account, the village often proved to be the only refuge of people who had fallen ill after being exposed to unhygienic conditions in Calcutta and the demands that that city made on everyday life. It was also common, Chandranath tells us, for people to periodically retreat to the cleaner and more familiar environment of their native village to renew cultural and social ties with members of the extended family they had left behind. We may aptly recall similar occurrences from the early life of Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820-91) who suffered from recurring sickness during his student days in Calcutta and had to return periodically to his birthplace, Birsingha.

Sitanath appears to have been an enterprising man, and it was not biting poverty or the exasperating search for a livelihood that took him to Calcutta, sometime in 1852, when Chandranath was about eight years old. Securing a good, modern education for his sons was foremost in Sitanath's mind. By the 1840s, English language education had clearly assumed greater utility and relevance for vocational success, and not surprisingly, Sitanath's first

choice was the General Assembly's Institution, later known as the Scottish Church School. But this soon proved to be a culturally perilous choice since the family feared that in such an institution, there was a realistic danger of the boy being whisked away by his European teachers and made to embrace Christianity. It was common knowledge that that had indeed been happened at the neighboring Hindu College. Eventually, the perceived evangelist threat to "unsuspecting" Hindu boys achieved the spectacular: it brought together men from rival ideological camps to start educational institutions of their own. In 1846, the Brahmo theologian Debendranath Tagore joined hands with the influential leader of the Hindu conservatives in Calcutta, Radhakanta Deb (1784–1867), to establish the Hindu Hitarthi Vidyaylay. More conversions in 1848–1849 led Debendranath and Radhakanta to come together a second time in founding the Hindu Metropolitan Institution in 1853. We do also know that the Scottish Mission, which ran the Scottish Church School, was in the habit of distributing free copies of the Bible, a practice that at the time only a man like Rammohun could accept.

Chandranath spent no more than six months at this school after which he was moved to the Oriental Seminary, a school started in 1829 by the Hindu philanthropist, Gourmohan Adya (1805–1846). Gourmohan was keen to impart an accessible and modern English language education, freed of anxieties that parents might entertain about their boys taking to "alien" thoughts and life styles. He disapproved of what the Derozians had once brought to student life in the city, shocking orthodox opinion and brazenly questioning all forms of authority. The Oriental Seminary, when compared to the Hindu College, was an institution that wedded social conformity to the vocational value of modern learning. It was Gourmohan's policy, as endorsed by the Bengali dramatist, Amritlal Basu (1853–1929), to recruit Anglo Indian teachers at the primary level, seasoned and qualified Indians at the middle level and Europeans for higher classes. It was this continuing zeal to for locating competent teachers for his school that also prematurely and tragically ended his life. When returning from Serampore College where he had gone in search of a European teacher, his boat was caught in a storm and capsized in mid Ganges. That Gourmohan's efforts met with the support of the Calcutta gentry is evident from the approving remarks made by the conservative Bengali daily, the *Samachar Chandrika* of 12 September 1831. Other contemporaries of Chandranath, also to be associated with the Oriental Seminary, were Womeshchandra Bonerjee (1844–1906), the first President of the Indian National Congress, the journalist Girishchandra Ghosh (1829–1869), Gurudas Bandopadhyay (1844–1918), later Vice Chancellor of Calcutta University, the writer and naturalist, Akshay Kumar Dutta (1820–1886) and the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941). In Chandranath's time, the Headmaster appointed for the institution was one Kailashchandra Basu, a product of the Hindu College who was also active in

the Bethune Society which was committed to promoting female education. Some of his influence appears to have rubbed off on Chandranath himself since, notwithstanding his deeply conservative views on the Hindu woman and wife, Chandranath never discouraged the idea of suitably educating the girl child. At the Oriental Seminary, Basu had also the good fortune of being taught by some of the most celebrated teachers at the time, including the famed Capt. David Lester Richardson (1801–1865). By Chandranath's own admission, this strengthened his command over English considerably while knowledge of the Bengali language languished. Chandranath barely managed to scrape through the Entrance examination in 1860–1861, passing in the second division. In hindsight, this seems something of an aberration given his consistently brilliant academic performance hereafter. His next target was to secure admission to the Presidency College for higher studies. However, the family could ill afford a monthly fee of rupees 12 to 16 which is what the College charged at the time and Chandranath's life and career would have taken an altogether different turn but for the generosity of W.S. Atkinson of the Education Department and Harekrishna Adya, Gourmohan's brother. Between them the two patrons secured for Chandranath a monthly stipend of rupees 12. Somewhat in the manner of both Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827–1894) and Iswarchandra Vidyasagar, Chandranath befriended powerful European officials all his life and often benefited from their support and patronage.

At Presidency College too, Chandranath enjoyed the tutelage of some brilliant teachers like Pearycharan Sarkar (1823–1875), best known for leading the Temperance Movement and for his hugely popular *English Primer* published in two parts. Among his other teachers was E.B. Cowell (1826–1903), sometime Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College and the first scholar to hold the Sanskrit Chair at Cambridge.

Chandranath's academic performance at Presidency was brilliant. He may have topped the list of graduates in the year 1865 with Rashbehari Ghosh (1845–1921) and Heinrich (Henry) Blochmann (1838–1878) standing second and third respectively. There is less uncertainty about his standing first in the M.A. examination in History for the year 1866. The following year he cleared the B.L. examination which Rashbehari Ghosh topped. Though a qualified lawyer, Chandranath did not practice law until about 1875–1876, albeit only briefly. In his testimony, the legal profession proved to be far from rewarding. Allegedly, it was plagued by incompetence, mutual bickering, and petty professional rivalries. Throughout his career Chandranath remained distrustful of the state establishment and showed an independence of character that on occasions came in the way of pursuing a career in the government. His career as a nominated Deputy Magistrate in Dhaka was extraordinarily brief and in hindsight, it seems that his closest friends and mentors had a fairly good clue about jobs that did not temperamentally

suit him. Bankimchandra, for instance, prophesized that Basu's tenure at Dhaka as a Deputy Magistrate would be short. What Chandranath himself reports is quite revealing; in his experience, Magistrates had little power or independence of their own and were constantly pushed by the local police to give rulings in their favor. His unsettled career was to soon pose problems for Chandranath. He tried doing odd jobs as for instance, teaching history at the Oriental Seminary, and subsequently at a Cuttack College. Both of these he gave up soon. Maheshchandra Nyayratna (1836–1906), Principal of the Calcutta Sanskrit College, recommended him for a job as Principal of the Maharaja's College at Jaipur with promises of securing more lucrative positions in the local administration. Apparently, these did not prove to be tempting enough for Chandranath and what he writes of his experiences at Jaipur is worth reproducing at some length:

> There is no doubt in my mind that had I been able to give the slightest of twists to my conscience and stayed steadfast in a job for the next five to seven years, I would have been counted among the rich of the city (of Jaipur). But neither the food nor the social environment of Rajasthan were suitable and it dawned on me that it would be impossible to continue serving in Rajasthan without compromising my independence in the slightest … at Jaipur one caught sight of only barren hills and plentiful sand whereas I was habitually a resident of an area that was no less than the garden city of India. Those dry and lifeless conditions did not go down well with me. [126]

Having spent only a couple of months at Jaipur, Chandranath proceeded on home leave, never to return.

Back in Calcutta, Chandranath was soon faced with mounting financial pressure; his debts at the time had risen to about Rs. 4,000 and additional creditors were hard to find. In 1863, he had married Mahalakshmi Devi, daughter of a reasonably affluent man, Jagweswar Ghosh, who owned two houses in a prominent locality of north Calcutta. One of these houses Jagweswar gifted to the daughter in marriage and this no doubt amounted to a substantial saving on house rent for the newly married couple.[127] All the same, with children being born to the couple, expenses piled up, and the family did have to face grueling poverty for a time. Chandranath writes regretfully of how the wife went without a blanket in peak winter and happily continued to wear tattered saris. Nor did she make any pressing demands on him for clothes, jewelry, or for small and sundry objects of pleasure. Evidently, this was to have a considerable influence on Chandranath's idealization of the utterly devoted and selfless qualities of the Hindu wife. In such equanimity and selflessness, he found justification also for adult men marrying the girl child. In his view, only early marriage and domestication could

produce well adjusted couples.[128] Chandranath was well aware of the rise of consumerism unleashed on his city through prominent hoardings mounted on busy street corners, advertising a range of fancy, imported products, and remained grateful to his wife for not stretching the already paltry domestic budget. His debts were finally cleared through a generous loan secured from one Ruplal Mitra, a relative of Radhakanta Deb. Even so, Chandranath was hard put to repay to his creditor as much as rupees fifty each month.

In 1879, good fortune smiled upon Chandranath when a vacancy arose in the Bengal Library. The then Director of Public Instruction, Sir Alfred Woodley Croft (1841–1928) was personally known to Chandranath as was his replacement, Charles Henry Tawney (1837–1922) who happened to be among his teachers at Presidency. On their recommendation, Basu was appointed Librarian of the Bengal Library and Keeper of the Catalogue of Books on a monthly salary of Rupees 200 to 250. Chandranath served against this post for a period of a little over eighteen months.

Writing in Bengali came to Chandranath fairly late in life when he was past forty and in good measure, this can be attributed to the resounding journalistic success of Bankimchandra's monthly journal *Bangadarshan,* launched in 1872. There was also good personal bonding between the two, not to speak of the similarities in ideas or arguments.[129] One of Chandranath's best known works, *Shakuntalatattwa* (1881), was dedicated to Bankimchandra and between 1881 and 1884, Chandranath was to contribute over half a dozen articles to the *Bangadarshan*, at least one of which was subsequently published as a book.[130] Only two decades earlier, Chandranath had preferred to write exclusively for English language newspapers or journals. *The Calcutta University Magazine* he ran with the assistance of Syed Hussain Bilgramii (1844-1926), his fellow student at Presidency and later an important member of the Muslim League. One of his early essays *On the importance of studying history* (1864) published in this journal drew praise even from *The Englishman* for its elegant prose. It was at this time that Chandranath contributed regularly for popular English language dailies like the *Bengalee* edited by his fellow student at Oriental Seminary, Girishchandra Ghosh. His reviews of contemporary Bengali works like Bankimchandra's novel, *Krishnakanter Will* (1878) and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's *Paribarik Probondho* (1882) successively appeared in the pages of *Calcutta Review*. His days at Presidency were also characterized by a turn towards liberal reformism. As was common among young Hindus at the time, Chandranath was temporarily drawn to the pious personality of the Brahmo reformer Keshabchandra Sen. However, he found the reformer's profuse borrowing from philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment quite tedious and uninspiring. He also would not take to wearing glasses for fear of being mistaken for a Brahmo![131] It is to be noted that though his conservative views on Hindu society and culture were contested by leading Brahmo

journals like *Bharati* and *Sanjivani*, Chandranath himself reveals no particular animosity toward the Brahmos of the kind most vociferously articulated by the so called *Bangabasi* writers, chiefly Jogendrachandra Basu and Indranath Bandopadhyay.[132]

In the 1860s, Chandranath was an active member of various debating clubs and literary forums which encouraged him occasionally to deliver public lectures. He joined the Burrabazar Literary Club in central Calcutta in 1866 and a couple of years later, the *Bengal Social Science Association,* modeled on the *National Association for the Cultivation of Social Science in Great Britain* (1867). The *Social Science Association* was a mixed body of Indians and Europeans, headed by W.S. Setton Karr (1822–1910) with Henry Beverley serving as the Secretary. Among Indian members were Pearychand Mitra (1814–1883), Kissorychand Mitra (1822–1873), Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, and Krishnamohan Banerjee (1813–1885). The *Bengal Social Science Association* instituted a series of annual lectures of which the inaugural lecture was delivered by Nawab Abdul Latif (1828–1893) on the state of education among Bengali Muslims. The second of these lectures was delivered by Chandranath Basu in January 1868 on *What is the most Practical Method of Educating the Hindu woman?* Only two months later in March that year, Basu spoke on *The Present System of Education in the University of Calcutta*. His pamphlet titled *Some University Matters* (1872?) is now untraceable. It is little known that in the early 1870s, Chandranath spoke and wrote extensively on economic themes, such as coping with recurring famines, encouraging native industries, possibly anticipating even Bholanath Chunder (1822–1910). Hereafter, his thoughts appear to have shifted ground from the politics of landed bodies to that of middle-class professionals. In his early life, Chandranath had joined the British Indian Association in opposing the imposition of an education cess and road cess, arguing that this violated the provisions of the Permanent Settlement. His 1871 essay *The Duke of Argyll on the Permanent Settlement* accuses the government of a breach of trust and found the recurring famine conditions in Bengal to be essentially resulting from a poor distribution of food supplies. Here he chose to echo Buckle's view that thought and intellectual disciplines were of no practical value in resolving material problems. His hope lay in the British Navy which he believed could substantially contribute to lessening agrarian misery by ensuring a regular food supply:

> Let England but do this act and she will find herself enthroned by the universal of mankind and the noblest and the most fearless guardian of Humanity.[133]

By the mid-1870s, Chandranath had clearly swung in favor of middle class politics which had escalated sharply at the time. Over 2,000 graduates

gathered at the Calcutta Town Hall on 1 July 1870 to give voice to their pressing political and economic demands. In 1876, he defended the foundation of the Indian Association, notwithstanding the fact that only a year previously, Sisir Kumar Ghosh (1840–1911) of the *Amrita Bazar Patrika* had launched the India League. This was, at heart, symptomatic of conflicts born of two rival political groups rooted in identical social classes and yet, Chandranath chose to move a resolution, seconded by the Brahmo evangelist, Nagendranath Chattopadhyay (1843–1913), which claimed that the Indian Association was more likely to forge greater middle-class unity on political questions. Through the 1870s, Basu continued to speak on key questions concerning education and employment. Two of these were delivered before the Bethune Society; the first in 1869 (*The Effects of English Education upon Indian Society*) and the second in 1878 (*Higher Education in India*).

It was in the 1880s that Basu's life and career underwent a double transformation. One of these marked his emergence as a talented writer of Bengali prose and the second, settling down to a respectable career in the government. In 1887, Alfred Croft persuaded Chandranath to join as the Translator to the Bengal Government. This was not a job Basu coveted, especially as it was known to be extremely demanding. A predecessor in office, Rajkrishna Mukhopadhyay (1845–1886), was known to have succumbed to the pressure, prematurely dying of diabetes. Chandranath's joining the post, therefore, was conditional and Sir Alfred reluctantly agreed to let him go in case he could not put up with the taxing requirements of the job. As things turned out, Chandranath increasingly took to a liking for his new employment, notwithstanding the heavy demands that this placed on his time and health. He came to relate to it quite professionally and with some personal satisfaction, once declaring that even God Himself would not find him wanting in honesty, sincerity, and diligence. Chandranath was to hold that position for the next 17 years, retiring in 1904 on a monthly pension of Rs. 175. On the strength of the support and recommendations that he received from several high-ranking European officials, Basu applied for a special enhanced pension but quite unsuccessfully, as it would appear.

In 1891, he was officially summoned by the Government of India to testify in the sedition case instituted against the *Bangabasi*. The case revolved around some allegedly seditious articles that were written in protest against the Age of Consent Bill. The proposed rise in the legal age of consent from ten to 12 produced a near revolt in the streets of Calcutta and even in neighboring towns. The protest fanned out on an unprecedented scale and looked more menacing than orthodox opposition had been to the act enabling Hindu Widow marriages. The Hindu orthodoxy deemed the proposed changes to be grossly detrimental to Hindu religious and ritual life and even men like Bankim and Vidyasagar gave it only their qualified

support. Of the five essays that the government charged the *Bangabasi* with seditious thought[134], Chandranath identified at least two to be the work of Akshay Chandra Sarkar. In the end, the author, printer, and publisher escaped a heavy jail term upon tendering unqualified apologies to the government.

Chandranath's literary oeuvre comprises mainly of essays which were published in leading Bengal journals of the day including the *Bangadarshan* and *Sahitya*. Several book-length works that appeared in print were, in reality, collections of essays reprinted from journals or else works originally serialized in journals. This qualification applies to the *Shakuntalatattva* (1881) *Pashupatisamvad* (1884), *Phol o Phool* (1885), *Tridhara* (1891), and *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas* (1892). In some cases, printed works turn out to be adaptations from lectures delivered at several forums as, for example *Hindu Vivaha* (1887,) originally a lecture delivered at the annual meetings of the Savitri Library, Calcutta, and *Ka Pantha*, (1898), also delivered from the same premises. It might confuse the reader to find some of these titles reappear in other works. Shortened versions of *Ka Pantha* and *Hindu Vivaha* are also to be found in his magnum opus, *Hindutva*, which was really a collection of both new and previously published articles. Though Chandranath Basu is today mainly known for *Hindutva,* this work did not turn out to be very popular. A second edition of the work appeared only over ten years later, in 1903. In those ten years, the book sold less than one hundred copies. A major work that was neither serialized nor adapted from a public lecture was *Savitritattva* (1900). These apart, Chandranath wrote extensively on the domestic economy of the Hindus: *Garhasthya Paath* (1886), *Garhasthya Swasthavidhi* (1887), *Shanjam Shikkha ba Nimnatam Sopan* (1904) and a Foreword to a domestic manual authored by a Brahmo lady from Cuttack, Prasannatara Gupta (*Paribarik Jeebon,* 1903). It is little known that Chandranath produced a farce titled *Partition Prahelika* based on the partition of Bengal in 1905. Originally published in the *Bangabasi* and only subsequently published as a pamphlet. For want of extant copies, its tone cannot be exactly determined. Chandranath followed this up with an English translation titled *The Partition Riddle* in 1906, carrying an appendix called *The Partition Agitation*. This belies his own claim that after 1881 he never wrote in English outside his official work. Given the fact that a little over ten years back, the leading conservative daily, the *Bangabasi* had narrowly escaped severe State prosecution it would be reasonable to say that the political tone of these works could not have been belligerent. To that must be added the fact that Chandranath himself was dependent on a government pension. In the early 1880s, the publication of the *Anandamath* had led to Bankim's being summoned at the Bengal Secretariat and only a good word from his contemporary Keshabchandra Sen, a man notoriously loyal to the government, had saved him from being dismissed from service.

Some of Basu's writings were compiled into textbooks and introduced to middle-level schools. We know of at least four such works, the *Sahitya Pustak* (1892), *Prothom Neeti Pustak* (?), *Nutan Paath* (?), and *Chandrakona* (1918) that were in circulation even after his death in 1910. As a textbook writer, Chandranath may not have been very successful, and earnings from this source in all probability did not substantially supplement his modest pension. That apart, rivalry between textbook writers as had been known to exist even in Vidyasagar's time was still fairly visible. Chandranath was once drawn into an unpleasant confrontation with the poet-administrator, Nabinchandra Sen (1847–1909). Reportedly, Chandranath, as an influential member of the School Text Book Committee, opposed the selection of Sen's *Palashir Juddha* (1875) on grounds of its radical political message and erotic overtones. Furious at this charge, Sen alleged that Basu's disapproval was really to make way for his text book, *Prothom Neeti Pustak*. Rebuffed by Chandranath's opposition, Nabinchandra sought the intervention of two extremely influential figures of the day, Gurudas Bandopadhyay and the well-known Indologist, Haraprasad Sastri (1853–1931). Sen's campaign against the Text Book Committee and the public debate it generated so irked the government that it soon proceeded to dissolve the body altogether.

Especially after 1887, Chandranath Basu was drawn into protracted controversy with the liberal-reformist camp mainly comprising Brahmos. By this time, Hindu cultural opinion had been sharply polarized with the emergence of the *Bangabasi* and its rival, *Sanjivani,* representing the conservative and reformist camps respectively. It was also the period when the debate around notions of Hindu marriage and conjugality had intensified following the Rukmabai case in Bombay whereby a spirited woman challenged the limitations that Hindu patriarchy had placed on her as a child bride. The Woman Question was one that was regularly agitated at the Social Conference led by Mahadev Govind Ranade (1842–1901) but what infuriated the orthodoxy most at both Bombay and Calcutta was the crusade persistently carried out by the Parsi reformer, Behramji Malabari (1853–1912) whose classic *Notes on Enforced Widowhood and Infant Marriage* (1884) had created quite a stir among the lions of reform. Malabari antagonized the Hindu orthodoxy for two overlapping reasons: first, many Hindus resented the intervention of a non-Hindu in social matters ruling the life of a Hindu and second, his garnering support for woman related reform in India from men and women in England. This only deepened and intensified orthodox sentiments that. Opposition to state supported legislation also clearly hinged on the question of winning greater political represntations for Indians which could then empower them to resolve social problems affecting their community. In Bengal, a group of thinkers consistently expressed concern at the "undue haste" shown by reformers. This was the substance of Bankimchandra's objections to Vidyasagar's campaign to put an end to Hindu polygamy.

A more poignant point was later expressed by Vivekananda who exhorted fellow Hindus to aim more at "grass root reform" which emphasized bringing basic education to a greater body of men and women. It was also the Swami's feeling that reform campaigns as then carried out by Hindu reformers were more "destructive" in their nature or consequences than creative or constructive.[135]

Interestingly, the critics of Malabari were not confined to the Hindus alone. Some Europeans themselves doubted if Hindu social conventions ought to be modeled on the Western. Writing to Malabari, Max Muller struck a note of caution:

> I think you should encourage early marriages but not premature ones. Otherwise you will drift into the European system which is very bad.[136]

Similar reservations were expressed by A.O. Hume to Malabari:

> In the existing state of the native social problems, no really impartial competent judge will, I believe, deny that many cases, their institutions work fairly well. There are millions of cases in which early marriages are daily proving happy and in which consummation having been deferred by the parents (and this, my friends say, is the usual case) till a reasonable age (I mean for Hindu girls) the progeny are, in so far as we can find, are perfectly healthy, physically and mentally.[137]

In Bengal, such reservations emboldened a more doggedly resistant stance which first came from figures like Akshay Chandra Sarkar. In 1885, Sarkar had authored an essay, later published in the *Nabajeebon*, a journal he personally edited. It disputed the argument that the greater child mortality in ethnic Bengal and the generally poor physique of the Hindu Bengali could be attributed to premature marriages. In countering this argument, Sarkar cited instances from the marginalized castes in Bengal and from north Indian cultures wherein the popularity of early betrothals or marriages had no noticeable effect on public health or mortality. It is interesting that especially in respect to the educated, upper bracket castes, Sarkar should actually put his finger on "weaknesses of character" (*charitrik durbalata*). This proved to be an important argument since on this rested two important premises articulated by Chandranath Basu: overcoming the growing inattention to traditionally respected customs or usages but more generally, the need to reassert Hindu cultural distinctiveness as against the European.[138] Sarkar was soon to suffix the 1885 lecture with a celebrated discourse delivered in 1887 at the Sovabazar Rajbari in Calcutta on the subject of Hindu widow marriages.[139] These lectures coincided with Chandranath's own views on the subject, also expressed on the same occasion.[140] At the Sovabazar Rajbari meeting, even

Indian Christians like Joygovinda Som (1839–1900) were heard to defend early marriages for girls in the interests of ensuring a better conjugal and community life.

Between 1887 and 1894, Chandranath was drawn into extended debates with Rabindranath Tagore on essentially two inter related issues concerning the everyday life of the Hindus: marriage and conjugality and dietary habits. Differences between the two figures also developed over certain religious and metaphysical questions[141] but these proved to be less consequential, especially given the ecumenism that had emerged in Hindu Bengali religious culture by the 1880s. Bankimchandra himself considered the older debate over whether God was formless (*nirakar*) or endowed with form (*sakar*) to be a vacuous debate[142] but the futility of such debates was more effectively communicated by the eclecticism of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa who had among his devotees both image worshiping Hindus and iconoclastic Brahmos. The Brahmos were also the first to publicize the novel religious experiments of Ramakrishna through the Bengali language press.

Prima facie, it looks intriguing that Chandranath's most consistent and staunchest critic, Rabindranath Tagore, had virtually nothing to say on the palpably more conservative writers like Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay and Akshay Chandra Sarkar whose views considerably shaped those of Chandranath himself. Only a few years back, Tagore was locked in controversy with no less a figure than Bankimchandra, accusing him of going back on an enlightened view of Hindu society and culture.[143] In contemporary Bengal, Akshay Chandra was indeed taken to be the most diehard opponent of all liberal reformism.[144] Of his contemporaries and fellow conservatives, he was perhaps the only figure to speak nostalgically of the self-immolation by the Hindu widow.[145] Other members of his family are also known to have done the same. Bhudeb, on the other hand, was the architect of the modern Hindu *Grihya Sutras* which sought to virtually freeze contemporary society in highly ritualized and irrational cultural practices of the past. Virtually no one remembers him now for his frighteningly archaic *Paribarik Probondho* or the *Achar Probondho* which meticulously lay down behavioral norms governing the everyday life of the Hindus. What he recommends as rightful conduct in Hindu homes is perhaps the least futuristic among all comparable treatises on the Hindu domestic economy. Arguably, Rabindranath chose to engage with Chandranath Basu alone follows from the fact that in his educational upbringing, the general range of interests, literary talent, and methods of public engagement, Basu was far closer to him than to either Bhudeb or Akshay Chandra. But this was not always apparent. In the 1880s and 1890s, Chandranath was precariously poised on the edge of a precipice from where he might have easily plummeted sharply downwards, never to return to reason and sanity. At the time, he was encouraged and supported by ideological camps which

recoiled at the very thought of engaging with contemporary Western thought and culture. Instead, they insisted on the return to dogmatic religion, ritual ridden social practices, the social ascendancy of the Brahmin and the consolidation of *jati* hierarchies. The pseudo scientism that this camp also adopted virtually mocked the demonstrated truths of science. In retrospect,however, we could justly commend Chandranath for never fully giving in to such irrational postures.[146] Though strongly advocating the idea of early marriages of girls and remaining steadfast in his opposition to widow marriages, Chandranath cannot be seen to support the custom of *garbhadhan* on which centered the orthodox opposition to the Consent bill.[147] Strangely, his *Hindutva*, which would have begun in the thick of the Consent Bill controversy, carries no reference to this custom. While strongly recommending the pursuit of a *dharmic* life, he did not think that moral lapses could be compensated by any ritual observances.[148] Importantly, he also appears to have taken a dynamic view of social rules and prescriptions, arguing that to interpret these in keeping with changing times would not amount to a violation of the shastras.[149] The culture of the Hindus and their ways of life were palpably superior to many other cultures but this by no means justified pejoratively calling a non Hindu, a *mlecha*.[150] Chandranath believed that there was a correlation between the food consumed and the state of mental or physical health; an argument which when taken at its face value, can be quite persuasive and not fundamentally opposed to rules of human physiology.[151] Also, his discourse on ideal Hindu food did not explicitly exclude the consumption of beef as was the case of Rajnarayan Basu, Bankimchandra and several others of that generation.[152] Chandranath had admiration and respect for Pundit Shasadhar but did not accept his pronounced leaning towards an ornate Puranic religion. Nor was he ever heard to echo bizarre theories about how to locate electricity and magnetism in the human body as Pundit Shasadhar would have him believe.[153] Judging by its content it is more likely that Rabindranath parodies Pundit Shasadhar and not Chandranath (as generally believed) in his hilarious poem *Hing Ting Chot*.[154] Chandranath was conservative without being fanatically so, stopping short of short of insularity and cultural obscurantism. Rather than take to a vulgar rejection of the Christian's God which the Hindu missionary Krishnaprasanna Sen resorted to,[155] he chose to cite the Bible by way of understanding certain Christian moral and social values. After Bankimchandra, Chandranath Basu was the Bengali litterateur who seriously took to literary criticism and a comparative study of literature. A contemporary, Bipinchandra Pal, testifies to the fact that Chandranath had secured a "very high place among Bengalee writers as an essayist and literary critic".[156] Above all, Basu showed remarkable geniality and self-restraint in relating to his ideological opponents. Some contemporaries noticed that on one level, the differences between Rabindranath and

Chandranath were more personal than ideological.[157] This perception is upheld by Tagore's own admissions in 1893:

> If only his (Chandranath's) sinister views had not represented those of a larger group that backed him, there never would have arisen the need for us to be drawn in some public debate."[158]

Interestingly, this is reminiscent of feelings expressed by Bankimchandra in his short-lived controversy with Rabindranath in 1884 over the question of interpreting classical Hindu texts. It was Bankim's allegation that behind the young Rabindranath he saw a larger "shadow" at work.[159]

Chandranath's biographer notes how in Rabindranath's novel *Ghare Baire* (1916), the lead character Nikhilesh has a tutor by the name of 'Chandranath Babu'. It has also been argued that the impatience that Tagore showed with Hindu conservatism at this time was partly determined by his second visit to the West from which he returned in 1890. It is precisely at that point that Chandranath began complaining of Rabindranath's European frame of mind. That this may indeed have been an element in the controversy was later suggested by Tagore himself in a personal letter written to the writer Pramath Chaudhury, to whom he was also related by marriage:

> The serenity of my Indian mind appears to be always rocked by the mercurial quality of the European civilization.[160]

Notwithstanding differences, the two figures had genuine affection and appreciation for each other. Chandranath's *Shakuntalatattva* drew praise from Rabindranath, who subsequently commented on the text himself. On his part, Chandranath was an avid admirer of Tagore's short stories and of his poetry.[161]

That he possessed high literary talent and served the cause of the Bengali language well was acknowledged by the Bangiya Sahiya Parishat (Bengal Academy of Letters) by electing him to the position of an office bearer in 1895. Next year, in 1896, he replaced the civilian Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909) as the President of the Parishat.

In his last years, tragically, Chandranath Basu had to suffer ill health and the trauma of personal bereavement. In 1901, he lost his eldest son, Pareshnath; in 1908, his eldest daughter, Dulu, and in 1910, only a few days before he himself passed away, his youngest son, Banku. An ardent believer in life after death, Chandranath may have drawn some consolation in the belief that the children he had so tragically lost had passed on to a happier life.[162]

At most places in his works, Chandranath nostalgically bemoans the passing of an era that for him manifested the best of Hindu social and cultural

values. Its waning represented the metamorphosis of an ancient civilization whereby older values, certitudes, and conventions had come to be either questioned or sharply attacked. It was a time when most educated Hindus felt desolate, denuded, and dissipated. Notwithstanding the "inverted world"[163] of colonial Bengal in which he was situated, Chandranath had both the will and the wherewithal to swim against the tide. Also, he might have discovered, much to his disappointment, that it took no particular courage to defy established rules and conventions or strike wildly irresponsible postures. That indeed was the substance of his work *Pashupatisamvad*. And yet, his attitude was not quite that of his mentor, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay who recommended that the Hindus adopt the posture of the tortoise which went into its defensive shell at the slightest signs of danger.[164] While a deep sense of loss and despondency occasionally marks his writings, Chandranath was, on the whole, a man with a disarming charm, serenity, and an outlook that exuding a strong sense of world affirmation. In one of his essays titled "Bhalobasha" (Love), he says:

> Never pause to consider if the world is good or bad before attaching yourself to it. Never cease to love this world … everyday life in this world and the world itself are filled with the presence of God and hence, this world fully deserves our love. Fix this truth firmly in your heart and fill it fully with love for this world and you shall find no troubles or impediments in your way.[165]

Both Bankim and Chandranath appear to have paid some attention to securing human happiness through a loving attachment to the world. The *Dharmatattva,* as we know, begins with a discussion on just how to overcome suffering.

By some odd coincidence two of the men who influenced Chandranath most, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay and Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, died the same year in 1894. Chandranath's own literary life practically ceased after 1906. When he began writing his autobiography in 1909, he was mostly sick and the work was left to his son Prakashnath to be completed.

The Calcutta University which he had served in important official capacities officially mourned his loss. In an obituary notice dated the 11 March 1911, Vice Chancellor Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee was to say the following:

> By the death of Babu Chandranath Basu we have lost one of (a) small band of brilliant graduates whose career and life spread the reputation of this university far and wide.His contribution to the literature of Bengal are of abiding and perennial interest and they will serve to hand his name down to posterity as that of one of the brightest products of English education in this country.[166]

Commentary on the Selections

Allowing for some thematic overlaps, the selections from Chandranath Basu included in Part II are divided into four sections: "Autobiographical", "The Many Components of Hindutva", "Hindutva as Patriarchy", and "Thoughts on Language and Literature". All selected excerpts are in my translation.

Excerpts selected for this part are drawn from a wide range of writings by Chandanath Basu. It would be an error to think that his thoughts on Hindutva are exclusively confined to his 1892 book. *Hindutva, Hindur Prakrita Itihas* was one of Basu's later works and incorporated essays earlier published under a different name or else as a part of some different work. Publication details of the essays excerpted are given in each case for the benefit of the reader. The exchanges between him and Tagore, for example, originally appeared in select journals but later included in his anthologies. This poses no particular problem for the reader since there is a clear internal consistency in his thoughts over time. Bankimchandra had once observed that he who did not willingly change his views was either a hypocrite and dishonest or else oblivious of the changes occurring around him. This was never an issue with Basu. The transition from a fairly radical critique of contemporary Hinduism to a somewhat didactic defense of older patterns of thought and cultural practice as is evident in the case of Bankimchandra does not seem to occur with Chandranath. There was also less backtracking in the case of Basu, an occurrence more visible with Bankim. A good instance of this is Bankim's essays for *Samya* (1872) which he later declined to republish in its original form. Once strongly critical of Swami Dayanand and the idea of a Vedic revival, Bankim, in the last years of his life, turned to an exposition of Vedic religion.[167] On the whole, Chandranath appears to have been less affected by mood swings and the recurring need for renegotiating with changing political or cultural exigencies.

It is not clear if Chandranath's knowledge of Sanskrit or a general familiarity with the corpus of Sanskrit literature matched that of Bankim and here I am inclined to argue that in all probability it did not. When commenting on Sanskrit texts like the *Mahabharata* or the plays of Kalidas, he resorted more often than not to the use of extant Bengali translations of the Sanskrit original. This was not necessarily the case with either Bankim or Bhudeb as evident in their reviews of *Uttarramcharita* or similar other works.

Chandranath's literary creativity was n doubt seriously curtailed by his professional functions as an official translator to the Bengal government. It was only recently that I realized that the summaries of numerous newspapers and journals from the 1890s appearing in the *Report on Native Papers* (Bengal) would have been largely his work. At the time I first consulted them, these struck me as very succinct and competent translations though in the absence of the Bengali original one cannot be sure about the subjectivity

or selection process employed in them. Despite my best efforts I could not procure copies of his English writings, either in his early days as a student of the Presidency College or during 1905 when he reportedly produced two small tracts in English on the partition and its aftermath. Arguably such writings would have little bearing on his position as a Hindu ideologue which is what this book aims to bring out. On the other hand, it would have been certainly useful to put together representative pieces from the entire oeuvre of his writings.

A. Autobiographical

Chandranath Basu's writings on himself are available at two places. There is an autobiographical fragment taken from Harimohan Mukhopadhyay's classic compilation, *Bangabhashar Lekhak* (1904) and reproduced in Basu's school textbook, *Chandrankona*.[168] But there is also a fuller account titled *Prithibir Sukh Dukkha* (1908),[169] originally serialized in the journal *Sahitya*. The 1908 volume runs into 114 pages with an Appendix titled "Durga Puja in my Boyhood". Mirroring the thought and personal experiences of a gifted litterateur, it carries both somber reflections and refreshing humor, a touching nostalgia for happy times gone by but also a warm optimism for what life may yet yield. It also represents some of the most brutally honest self-reflections produced in the late nineteenth-century Bengal that I have read.

Excerpts from Chandranath's autobiography included in this part bring out his deepest personal feelings and the most cherished dreams. It is, in fact, an excellent summary of how he perceived and understood his times and the immediate environment, the significant social and cultural changes occurring in his day that he gracefully accepted and those that he could not; the values that he wanted conserved and further strengthened and those that caused him considerable uneasiness and anxiety.

The overarching sense of his autobiographical writings touches upon the simplicity and innocence lost to inroads made by a very different set of ideas or values, joy and cheerfulness abruptly snatched away from unsuspecting lives, of children being prematurely forced to think and act like adults. It nostalgically dwells on a time when even old men could be as maverick and carefree as juveniles. There are hints here of a harmonious community life that was regulated by established conventions that everyone admired and respected. There was in contemporary Bengali rural life an active social consensus that could temporarily suspend even taboos concerning caste and ritual purity. The community oversaw recurring seasonal festivities and celebrations which effectively renewed older rhythms of everyday life and natural feelings of human bonding. Chandranath writes with a heavy heart of how the joy and juvenility that he had witnessed as a child was being fast eroded by the new demands being increasingly made on life.

Allegedly, this followed from thoughtlessly aping western manners and customs and here, Chandranath appears to be hinting at how the increased traffic between the village and the colonial city of Calcutta only hastened this transformation. The village itself was opening up to new laws of economic production and exchange which, in turn, produced new social relationships and behavioral norms. But the winds of change had indeed penetrated deeper and taken away in some measure, the attachment to rural life itself. In urban settings, employment under the English masters came at a price, Chandranath was to note. For one, in a changing work culture, now governed by clock time, promptness, punctuality efficiency and productive energy was expected of Indians to which, they were hitherto not habituated. The European boss appeared always to be mounted on a horse, ready to march off on some new errand. He was extremely demanding and hard to please in ways his Indian counterpart was not. That even when serving the highest public offices open to them, Indians had to put up with a frightening pace of work, physically taxing work culture, rigorous self-disciplining but above all, abuse and affronts hurled at them by the white employer. Bankim himself once made the jocular yet poignant remark about his body being "bent" from kicks made by the white master's boots.[170]

Surprisingly though, Chandranath does not speak ill of *chakri* or petty clerical employment. In his personal life he found such employment to be dignified not demeaning, professionally rewarding and supportive of good moral character. We do know that he served the government for nearly two decades and retired on a reasonably good pension. It could justly be said though that as a Translator to the Bengal government, Chandranath's status was far from that of a petty commonplace clerk. On retirement, his pension alone would have far exceeded the wages of an ordinary clerk working in an European mercantile office or under the government. Chandranath's point, however, was that even when demanding in some respects, service under the government saved him from falling prey to dishonesty and corruption which, a legal career would have led him to.

In his autobiography, Chandranath speaks of two principles to which he remained steadfast. The first of these was to focus on mental strength and adaptability. Basu's advice to his countrymen was to suitably prepare themselves mentally for combating the new and unprecedented challenges that changed political conditions in the country had placed on them. This reading, one must observe, was somewhat uncharacteristic of the man. Except in a general sense, he preferred to stay away from the political. When Lalmohan Ghosh (1849–1909), an important office bearer in the Indian National Congress, prepared to contest a seat in the House of Commons, Chandranath opposed the idea, arguing that the time was not yet opportune for Indians to enter institutional politics. It was far more desirable that they concentrated on first setting their own house in order.[171] This, as some readers would be

apt to recall, mirrors the debate that broke out between some colonial officials and Indians, notably between Sir Auckland Colvin (1838–1908) and the Indologist Kashinath Trimbak Telang (1850–1893) in the 1880s on whether or not the Indian demand for political concessions could take precedence over the amelioration of India's social ills and abuses.[172] Chandranath's penchant was for energizing the Hindu nation by recourse to the radical and antinomian traditions of Tantra. For someone belonging to his class, this was a surprising choice, to say the least. Bhadralok society in urban Calcutta looked upon Tantra with considerable alarm, associating it with socially and morally revolting practices. Chandranath's sense of Tantra, however, was more aligned to a new quasi-political culture than purely spiritual praxis. He alludes, for instance, to the extremely daring and esoteric practice of *shavasadhana*, in which the practitioner performed certain ritual acts in the dead of night seated on a cadaver and in the forbidding location of cremation grounds. His point, metaphorical it was, aimed at bringing back the courage and fearlessness in Bengali Hindus, commonly accused of cowardice and docility. Tantric practices he sees as the source of self-belief and *sakti* in a nation depressingly sunk in self-defeating moods. Interestingly, whereas in Bankim's writings it is absolute devotion to the Lord (Vishnu) that rescues mythical figures like Prahlad from certain death at the hands of tyrants, in Chandranath's understanding this follows from power individually acquired through Tantric *sadhana*. Chandranath shunned active institutional politics but upheld the idea of energizing and empowering the Hindus. Contact with the West had softened the Hindu bone and required to be offset by acquiring greater mental energy and mental combativeness. Interestingly, Chandranath does not speak of enhancing the Hindu Bengali's physical strength (*bahubal)* to the extent Bankim or Vivekananda are known to do.

His caution notwithstanding Chandranath Basu occasionally made fairly bold remarks about the character and functioning of British colonial rule. We do know that he opposed the partition of Bengal, however mildly, but there is at least one occasion when he prophesized that the British would eventually lose both their global empire and commercial predominance.[173]

The second principle that Chandranath briefly touches upon in his autobiography is the importance of securing domestic contentment in Hindu homes, hinging greatly upon the services rendered by the selfless Hindu wife. This is a theme that he develops more fully in his several other writings and a separate section is devoted to its study.

B. The Many Components of Hindutva

This section comprises ten excerpts chosen from the corpus of Chandranath's writings including a general statement of purpose (see B-1) which, surprisingly enough, appears only in the first edition of *Hindutva* but not the

second. The present selection covers a wide range of issues, some of which are philosophical in nature, others social and cultural.

In his prefatory remarks to *Hindutva*, Chandranath sounds somewhat guarded and reticent, rather than assertive and self-righteous. For instance, he notes the inherent difficulties of defining the term Hindutva itself. More importantly, he draws our attention to its modern provenance. The Hindus of the past did not quite feel the need to define themselves in relation to other nationalities or communities which, in his view, explains the absence of the term or its equivalent in classical Sanskrit literature. From this, it followed that Hindutva was quintessentially an identity-making project, born at a time when a people and their culture required to be invested with an interpretative yet consensually forged cultural label. Hindutva, in this view, acquired the qualities of a distinct personality. Writing some years after Chandranath, Bipinchandra Pal was to give this idea a fairly attractive gloss. It was Pal's claim that the idea of treating a people as a Being with a distinctive personality came from Mazzini and to this, Pal added the Hegelian idea of the self-conscious Personality trying to realize itself through time and history. Chandranath does not explicitly use this philosophical flourish since he was not well grounded in Western idealistic philosophy, but this is nonetheless an idea that vaguely surfaces in his writings every now and then. With Chandranath, the concepts of Hindutva, Nationality, and Personality become, on one level, semantically interpenetrating and interchangeable. It needs to be admitted, though, that this Nationality or Personality, whether expressed by Chandranath or Bipinchandra, was by no means composite but Hindu in both form and content.[174]

Both Chandranath's and Bipinchandra's writings hinge on the creation of typologies of race, thought-patterns, behavioral norms, and cultural idiosyncrasy. Whereas the European mind defined and differentiated, the Hindus combined and integrated; whereas the European mind analyzed, the Hindu mind synthesized. One of these cultures was by habit, intellectual and rational, the other emotional and imaginative.

In attempting to define Hindutva, Chandranath openly acknowledges his debts to Bhudeb and Bankimchandra. This is only fair since the figures he candidly acknowledges set the trail in two important directions. First, there was the idea strongly articulated by Bankim about the Hindus requiring their history and an active historical consciousness. On the other hand, Chandranath was to suggest what Bankim did not, at least with comparable clarity, that the Hindu conception of history differed sharply from that of the European. Further down this collection (see D-1), there is an incredibly hilarious exchange of views reported between the Indologist Henry Colebrook (1765–1837) and the Hindu Pundit, Jagannath Tarkapanchanan (1684–1807) on just how historical records may be conceived or constituted. That the Hindu's sense of history was discernibly different from that of

the European was a point argued by Savarkar too,[175] but Chandranath's own plea gravitated on the anthropological more than the archaeological. History was essentially the reflection of mental dispositions and cultural usages or habits and literary creations actually spoke more about the past than the discovery of a cache of charred human bones.[176] From Bhudeb, Chandranath borrowed the idea of how it was the community or the social collective that controlled the everyday life of the individual. In coping with the external world and its challenges, mental disciplining in the individual was not enough, this had to be backed by established social controls.

Two excerpts in this section (B-2, B-3) deal with metaphysical questions and clearly bring out the following. First, there is the persistence with the speculative philosophy of the Upanishads but more specifically, of the *Advaita* (non-dual) school best associated with Acharya Shankara. The 1894 review of *Hindutva* in the *Calcutta Review* was quite careless with its observation that while the author had selected "the noblest doctrine of Hinduism, he had not followed any one of the ancient schools".[177] There is more just ground for saying that Chandranath not only chose to valorize one particular school but chose not to represent even that in its true colors. This persistence with Vedanta, which, in effect, turns out to be shorthand for Advaita Vedanta, is surprising since in modern Bengal, this is generally attributed to two figures who are historically located at the two ends of the so-called Bengal Renaissance: Rammohun Roy and Swami Vivekananda. What links Chandranath to both Rammohun and Vivekananda is the potentially political twist that he gave to this philosophical tradition. Rammohun, as is widely known, gave an uncharacteristically utilitarian turn to Vedanta, traditionally regarded as *moksha shastra* or the path to the transcendental, whereas with Vivekananda, it came to acquire the status of a new Universal Religion for a reportedly spiritually starved humanity. Both these views carried a strong undercurrent of forging new social alliances and loyalties. Vedanta signified not just the unity of existence but also perhaps of India's destiny. Bipinchandra Pal was to put this point quite succinctly:

> Hindu monism enables him (the Hindu) to understand that different personalities do not break up the fundamental unity of Being…[178]

Chandranth's Vedanta remained distinct also in its meaning and application in as much as it accommodated, contrary to known practice, possibilities of popular image worship. Unlike Rammohun, his agenda was not to employ Vedanta to reject either the worship of multiple divinities or Hindu idolatry with its potentiality to breed sectarianism.

Even though his representation of Vedanta acquired a discernible political edge, Chandranath's treatment purposively retained the idea of God centered universe. In what appears to be some kind of pannentheism, Chandranath

treats God to be integrated with the world and yet distinct from it. It was Divine Presence that lent meaning to the world and also became the ground for a joyous, affirmative worldly life. The world abounded in hope, beauty and joyousness if only one was to acknowledge God's majesty and His good intentions for humanity (see B-10). It occurs to me that compared to Rammohun, Chandranath more clearly separated the ideas of God being the source of everything, essentially a semitic idea, and of everything being in God.[179]

A good part of the two excerpts cited is devoted to doctrinal questions where it was Chandranath's intention to demonstrate that Hindu theories of creation were superior to the European-Christian. At the same time, he takes good care to brush aside objections to monistic readings of the world that had been earlier articulated by evangelists but no less by Hindus themselves. Chandranath follows Shankara in arguing that the *jiva* (the individual soul) was ultimately no different from the metaphysical Absolute (*Brahman*), only separated by a thin and ultimately illusory veil of *Maya*. *Moksha* or liberation came with this realization, and the soul's ultimate objective was to return to its source, to be one with the *Brahman* through self-dissolution (*loy*). However, the *jiva* and *Brahman* were not identical, only constituted of the same substance. Quizzically, this left some room for dualism within the framework of non-dualism. The realization that *jiva* and *Brahman* were ultimately one did not give birth to private ego, warns Chandranath, since the same Consciousness pervaded all forms of life on earth and were part of a common cosmic destiny.

Apparently, not all critics could be silenced by such innovative arguments and in the early 1890s. Chandranath was drawn into a protracted controversy with the poet Rabindranath, bred in the philosophical dualism of the Brahmo Samaj. The debate between Chandranath and Rabindranath also touched upon certain semantic questions. Whereas Tagore took *loy* to be the annihilation of the self, Chandranath defined it as self-expansion (*atmasamprasaran*). It was also Basu's position that the so called "*nirguna Brahman*" of the Vedanta was not a God bereft of any qualities as commonly imagined but simply beyond ordinary human qualities. On the other hand, his claim that spiritual experiences of the Absolute could be recounted by spiritual practitioners goes against the grain of traditional wisdom. Ramakrishna once told Vidyasagar that Brahman could never be *ucchista* or ritually polluted by word of the mouth.[180] This pointed to the ineffability of all mystical experiences. On the contrary, it was Chandranath's view that Hindu *sadhana* especially could not be an exception in this regard.

B-8 is a summary of Chandranath Basu's views on the Hindu diet, an issue which also brought forth peeved protest from Tagore. In a sense, the poet's objections were slightly misplaced since it was not Basu's intention to put an embargo on animal food. The choice of food, as he argues, had to be

related to individual bodily needs and in every case, irrespective of the kind of food being consumed, it was important not to be gluttonous and greedy.

Not surprisingly, *Hindutva* includes an essay on the virtues of the traditional varna system in Hinduism and its contributions to the creation and consolidation of a "national" identity. Chandranath's cause was helped by the fact that Bhudeb's *Shamajk Prabandha* had already argued this persuasively. Basu's underlying argument here is two-fold. First, it was the varna system that allowed for continuous social cohesiveness as against discrete, conflicting identities. It provided the development of autonomous self-regulating units within a larger social framework. It was the varna system, Chandranath argues, that also aided greater solidarity between the upper classes and the lower in India than was possible in Europe. It prevented brutality, irresponsibility and godlessness. We have it on the authority of Chandranath's biographer that Chandranath's views on the subject persuaded even Bankimchandra to give up his views on the pitfalls of varna or jati hierarches.[181]

Four excepts in this section (B-4, 5, 6, and 9) are best read as a collective since tangentially or otherwise, they deal with what Chandranath considered to be the vital constituents of both Hinduism and Hindutva. The juxtaposition of the two is interesting since it suggests, as I have always suspected, that these are overlapping terms and yet distinct.

Of these, B-5 touches on *nishkam dharma*, a paradigm previously touched upon by Bankim in his *Dharmatattva* and later elaborated by Swami Vivekananda in his commentary on *Karma Yoga*. Chandranath follows Bankim in the argument that altruism cannot be performed at the expense of the self and that it was in any case an arduous and challenging practice to consistently follow. Where he departs from his mentor is in his disassociating it from political praxis. For Bankim, patriotism was the highest form of selfless action in the world; Chandranath, by comparison, more closely follows the *Gita* where the agency behind all work was God Himself, not man. In this matter, it must be said, he also differs from Vivekananda who would have us believe that the practitioner of *nishkam dharma* need not entertain any notion of God or religion.[182]

B-6 revives the older debate about whether or not God ought to be perceived as formless (*nirakar*) and without descriptive labels (*nirguna*). Here, it must be noted that the two positions did not always go together. The reformist Brahmo Samaj, for instance, stood by a formless god but not one bereft of qualities. The bhakti revolution in Bengal which was to touch the Brahmos early, relied heavily on the affective as did Bankimchandra's neo-Puranism. In his *Dharmatattva* and the *Krishnacharitra,* Bankim argued that a personal God was the highest conceptions of the Divine. The Brahmos, however, were also of the view that whereas religion was founded on reason, custom was pure caprice. It was also feared that popular religion

disrespected established social divides. Rammohun had broadly acknowledged the system of Hindu *adhikarbhed*, granting that the unschooled lower classes had to begin their religious life aided with symbolisms and props. Hindu ecumenism in the late nineteenth century, as I have earlier argued, considerably weakened this argument, further supported by reified social theories. Bankim argued that images were socially important and essentially transmuted an apparently gross idea into a form of aesthetic idealization. Idolatry, as Pal was to subsequently argue, was, in effect idea-latry.[183] Chandranath was quick to dispute the claim that it was monotheism alone that led to grand human feats and sophistication in culture. Arguably, he would have known of the idolatrous and polytheistic Greeks and Romans reaching an advanced state of civilization and creating mighty empires. Like Bankim, interestingly, Chandranath too felt that Indian artistic productions lacked in craftsmanship and aesthetic quality.[184]

B-9 simultaneously touches upon two of Basu's most favored principles and practices: the conquest of the self and regulating man-woman relations in Hindi society. There is a call to all Hindus for the recovery of courage, steadfastness in beliefs, forbearance and the capacity to ungrudgingly endure. At heart this is an attempt to counter the Orientalist charge of the slovenly and unenergetic Hindu male. Chandranath's ploy here was to cite exemplary characters from Hindu mythology who best demonstrated humanly coveted qualities. Mythological figures and character from Sanskrit literature are also invoked to create a consensus on further strengthening social controls that would perpetuate older values and keep wayward or errant behavior in check. Here it be relevant to note that the strategy employed in this instance differs from that of the more orthodox Hindu camp in completely overlooking the need for textual sanctions.[185] Apparently, Chandranath too believed that operatively, the community drew its social strength and sophistication from contemporary manners and custom and not the *shastras*.

C. Hindutva as Patriarchy

More than anything else, *Hindutva before Hindutva* gravitates on the dogged defense of patriarchal values and it is here that Hindu conservatism can be found in its most persuasive and eloquent forms. Chandranath Basu is often taken to be arch conservative in matters concerning the status of the Hindu wife or woman, especially judging by criticism leveled against him by Tagore. On the contrary, this section will attempt to show that on certain issues, Basu's views were not any more conservative than those of his like-minded contemporaries. If anything, he often draws upon the writings of his friends and compatriots to endorse and amplify his views.

Patriarchal opposition to changes in gender relationships appears to have taken several distinct yet interconnected forms. First, there was the offended

sentiments of the Hindu orthodox who felt that attempts at social innovation by an alien government were both morally and legally at fault. Such opposition may be witnessed in the activities of the Dharma Sabha or the refusal of the Calcutta *dalapatis* (community leaders) to agree to bend established social rules in favor of zealous reformers. After the 1870s, the issue of social legislation also became tied to the question of increased political representation for Indians. After a point in time, as we know, the Congress would not allow Ranade to hold annual meetings of the Social Conference at the same venues as the Congress held its own. By this time, the argument had gained ground that while political issues united Indians, social issues divided them. There was also the growing feeling that introducing "cosmetic" changes at the behest of an anglicized middle class could never be productive of social good. Swami Vivekananda often accused reformers of thoughtless "denunciation" and "destruction" whereas the greater need was for "grass root reform".[186] Even as late as 1909, Sri Aurobindo could argue that "widow marriages, substitution of class for caste, adult marriages, intermarriages, inter-dining…are mechanical changes which, whatever their merits or demerits cannot by themselves save the soul of the nation"[187] Finally, objection about undue haste came from Bankim in the context of Vidyasagar's attempt to legally debar polygamous marriages.

This section includes four important excerpts; two of which (see C2 and C3) are from book-length works of Chandranath, (*Shakutalatattva*, 1881 and *Savitritattva*, 1900) and contribute substantially to his reputation as a literary critic and social theorist. Both these stories that Chandranath retells and re-presents originate in the *Mahabharata*.

In so far as the Woman Question in Bengal was scattered over several key issues, it is important to determine Chandranath's location within it with some degree of precision. Contrary to general perceptions, his strongest or most repeated objections to reform Hinduism are not to do with the issue of widow marriage. In my reckoning, within the great corpus of his writings, there are only two works that are predominantly concerned with this question: in the tale of Savitri (*Savitritattva*) and in two essays included in the work *Hindutva* (see B-9). In the latter incidentally, the argument against widow marriage is only tangential and meant to illustrate the Hindu woman's acclaimed qualities of forbearance and steadfastness. The tale of Savitri too is not so much about the propriety of widow marriages as about the wife's unflinching faith in her husband, in her marriage vows, and responsibilities towards the extended family into which she is wedded. For Chandranath, arguably, these were qualities that may have actually saved Savitri from the fate of a widow and persuaded the God of Death (Yama) to make an exception with his own rules. The most rabid opponent of widow marriages in Chandranath's time was Akshay Chandra Sarkar[188] and even Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay can be found to claim that the Hindu cultural

influences had appreciably brought down the incidence of widow marriages among non-Hindus.[189]

Chandranath's forte really was the conservation and strengthening of traditional social conventions regarding first, early marriage for girls leading to her gradual transformation into an efficient and responsible housewife serving a fairly large household; second, ensuring that the community approved and sanctified such duties associated with the newly wedded wife and third, scrupulously staying away from pre-marital romance and any sexual misadventures. Basu, as I see it, had a pathological fear of the last:

> In all other respects we may indeed come to value our freedom but not in the matter of publicly exhibiting love, he declares at one place, Dryden may well say "One to one is cursedly confined", we would say "On to one is blessedly confined!"[190]

By implication, such marriages were also expected to uphold social and ritual hierarchies or rules of commensality.

Regulating the domestic economy of the Hindus in a way that met established social, cultural or ritual needs was Chandranath's foremost consideration. He may have indeed shared the widespread anxiety about unwed girls turning lecherous and licentious but his social treatises tend to highlight a set of different needs: the newlywed wife's capacity to integrate herself with the needs of the extended family. In Chandranath's view that was the most pressing justification for early marriage in girls since with age, women progressively lost their ability to either understand or effectively fulfill the recurring needs of a large family unit. The proper grooming of the Hindu wife had to be attempted while she was still young, perhaps only a couple of years into married life. Chandranath's patriarchal instincts also persuaded him to plead for a substantial difference of age between the husband and the wife. A couple of comparable age would look more like frivolous and irresponsible play-mates in worldly life that was full of recurring challenges. The desired difference in ages provoked some satirical verses from Tagore which depict a newlywed couple where while the educated adult husband was trying to draw his wife into romantic conversation, the child-bride unmindfully continued to play with her dolls.[191] Elsewhere, Chandranath gives expression to his unconcealed anxiety at the changes occurring in the role of the Hindu woman and wife. He worried over the educated wife being addicted to novels, with no particular domestic skills or abilities of her own and hence remaining entirely dependent on services provided by domestic helps. Evidently, this arrangement taxed paltry domestic budgets but even more alarming was the practice then developing among the Calcutta nouveaux riche of getting educated men from poor families to marry their uncouth and good for nothing daughters. Such men were invariably hosted

by affluent fathers in law for the rest of their "miserable" lives. Such women cared little either for the husband or for his extended family but flew into a rage when their smallest demands were not met. In *Savitritattva*, Savitri's exemplary conduct comes forth not so much in getting her dead husband brought back to life but the laudable selflessness and nobility of heart which makes her think of putting the faily before the self. When Yama, having revived her husband and feeling extremely pleased with both her erudition and devotedness, grants her three additional boons. Savitri then asks that eyesight be restored to her blind father in law and that he be allowed to win back his lost kingdom. Thereafter, she asks that a hundred sons be born to her, not out of some extraordinary maternal instincts but only so that her husband's lineage and family tradition be perpetuated. If anything, Chandranath bemoans the fast degenerating life in contemporary Bengali society where modern Savitris were hard to find. The Savitri of *Mahabharata* was spirited (*teji*) woman, truly befitting her great qualities of head and heart. Modern Bengali women, on the contrary, had all the *tej* minus these qualities. Their *tej* they chose to inflict on the infirm father in law and the hapless, henpecked husband! In hindsight, such thoughts appear to have gained some currency and social resonance, especially in the urban bhadralok society of Calcutta. The civilian Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909), by no means known for his conservatism, was to profusely praise both the *Shakuntalatattva* and *Savitritattva*[192]

The work that deservedly brought Chandranath the greatest fame was his analysis of the Shakuntala story originating in *Mahabharata* (Adi Parva, chapters 68–74). The story, as we know, was given dramatic form by Kalidas. It evoked great interest and admiration among Indologists and readers of Sanskrit literature in both India and Europe. It was translated into English by William Jones in 1789 and it was in that form that it reached Goethe in 1792. Monier Monier-Williams produced a second English translation in 1853. It was published in Bengali script by Premchand Tarkabagish in 1839 and in Devnagari script (with an Introduction by Cowell) in 1860. It appeared in Vidyasagar's translation in 1854, of Nando Kumar Roy in 1855 and by Jyotirindranath Tagore, possibly in 1900.

The main storyline of the Shakuntala story is too well known to be repeated here; what remains for us is to analyze modern readings of a classical text from the perspective of reigning social ideas or values.

Besides Chandranath, two other major literary figures of the period commented on the work; Bankim in an article of 1876 published in the *Bangadarshan* and Tagore in 1902.[193] Quite remarkably, all three fundamentally agree on the view that despite being mistreated, Shakuntala does not protest her fate. In Chandranath's retelling of the story, based as it was on Kalidas's play and not the *Mahabharata*, the lovers were made to suffer the agonizing fate on account of their choosing to opt for the *Gandharva*

form of marriage where the agreement to marry is settled purely between the marrying partners. In Chandranath's view, it was because the marriage and sexual union between Dushyanta and Shakuntala occurred without the consent of the community that they had to put up with the traumatic consequences of both the king's amnesia and Shakuntala's suffering the indignity of being publicly rejected as a wife. Had this not been the case, there would have been no dearth of witnesses to support Shakuntala's claims in Dushyanta's royal presence.

Arguably, the image of a demure and un-protesting Shakuntala follows from careful cultural choice This deliberately keeps aside the older version of the story in the *Mahabharata* where, upon being unjustly rejected by Dushyanta, Shakuntala recoils like "a venomous serpent with its hood raised"; her sense of shame and indignity assuming the properties of a leaping flame that threatens to burn down the offender. More significantly, Shakuntala also has a counter argument that she threw at her husband, arguing that empirical habits of the mind did not always offer the best solution to human problems. The human soul, she points out, was in itself a key witness to righteous and unrighteous conduct in the world and this did away with the need for corroboration by material witnesses.[194]

It is not improbable that Chandranath was aware of the radical difference in characterizing Shakuntala in the *Mahabharata* and the Kalidas versions respectively and understandably enough, opted for the latter. Kalidas, in Chandranath's understanding, had rightly honored the Hindu view of womanhood in all her virtuosity and shining selflessness. It was just as well that she had not been modeled on a Portia or Isabella. Chandranath was subsequently led to point out how, a woman's flaunting her knowledge or professional skills was only likely to rob her of her womanly qualities.[195]

Not surprisingly, Bankimchandra too echoes the objections against *Gandarbha* marriages which put romantic love before parental consent and approval by the larger community. However, he did have a kind word for Shakuntala's unflinching devotion to her lover and husband. The modern housewife forgot all about the husband when fondling her pets while Shakuntala had risked the terrible curse of Durvasa by focusing all her thoughts on Dushyanta![196] Tagore, as we know, wrote two successive essays on the subject in which his focus too was on the clandestine union of the lovers. Durvasa's curse was but an allegory ensuring social retribution on a wayward woman who overlooked all sense of propriety and respect for social conventions in hosting such a venerable guest as the sage Durvasa. The only redeeming quality in Shakuntala's behavior was her unwavering attention to her paramour and husband and even though this proved distracting in the context of the story, Shakuntala could not have been faulted for neglecting her obligations as a woman. Single-minded devotion to the husband was the wife's foremost duty though, quite disturbingly, as Tagore

observed, such values were being eroded by a false vanity in women born of a superficial education.[197]

There was indeed a second ideological component to the way readers in Chandranath's time received *Shakuntlatattva* and this had to do with the reactive defense of the Hindu's cultural autonomy. Bankim had high praise for the work: "A single hour of study of the *Shakuntlatattva* by the Bengali writer Baboo Chandranath Bose is worth all thon at Europe has had to say on Kalidas, not excepting even Goethe's well known eulogy".[198] Such praise was natural given the context in which it originated. It had consistently been Bankim's complaint that Europe often misunderstood and misrepresented India. A true understanding of culture was really a matter of the insider's ability and prerogative, not that of the interested outsider. In 1882 he used this argument to counter Rev. William Hastie's charge that notwithstanding their high modern education, the Hindus had remained idolatrous.

As is well known, Chandranath was embroiled in an extended controversy with the poet Tagore over the spirit and functions of Hindu matrimony. Basu's views, first published as a booklet titled *Hindu Vivaha* (1887) were later included in his *Hindutva* on which our excerpt is based (see C-1). This was the controversy that most irked Rabindranath if only on account of the multiple dimensions it acquired. First, there was the ongoing older debate on a propitious age for getting girls married but over time, this also acquired some political resonance. Tagore scoffed at the suggestion that the underlying purpose of Hindu marriages was some spiritual fulfillment for the marrying couple. He was inclined to believe that like marriages in other cultures, it was to produce (preferably) a male progeny and that gave Hindu marriages a more functional character than spiritual. What Basu did not adequately make clear and that which even Tagore stopped short of admitting, was that for the Hindu, the social obligations of producing a male progeny were, in fact compounded by some ritual obligations. The son not only took forward the family name and lineage but his duty also comprised paying ritual obeisance to departed ancestors. In hindsight, it may be added that Tagore somewhat underestimated the strength and consistency of Chandranath's belief in afterlife[199] and the value that the fulfillment of one's social and ritual obligations were expected to have on the quality of that life.[200] As Chandranath himself put it, a man had three kinds of debts to be redeemed in his lifetime: to God, to the sages and to ancestors and ritually, all three depended on the services rendered by a son. He was to also claim that but for the first born son, all other sons born to a couple were born of lust. However, this is not a principle that he followed in personal life since four sons were eventually born to him. The other issue that caused considerable mutual distrust and bitterness between opposed camps was that of whether or not early marriages produced unhealthy children and high mortality rates. The man to most vigorously rebut this claim was

again Akshay Chandra but Chandranath too believed that he was in the right in pointing to the heavy toll of human life that malarial fever had taken in the Bengal countryside. In his opinion that issue required greater and more immediate attention than efforts to raise the age of marriage for Hindu girls.

Basu was cognizant of contemporary thinking in the West and within reformist circles in India about the demeaning maltreatment of women in marriage and in ordinary domestic life. It was dehumanizing and acutely embarrassing, he admits, for any civilized society to treat the daughter like some commodity, to be gifted away (*sampradana*) in marriage. In this social arrangement, the girl never freed herself from ownership rights held by another. Before marriage, she was the property of the father to give away and thereafter, the groom's personal property. What Chandranath then says by way of explanation is simply bizarre and absurdly apologetic. The bride, he claims, is made out to be the property of the groom only so that she can be treated respectfully. After all, the gods too, whom the Hindus revered and respected, were the devotee's property!

In substance, Chandranath's treatise on Hindu marriages also sounds an anxious warning about the renewed need for Hindus to put their house in order. He alludes here to impending threats of Socialism, Communism and, in the least, the agitation that may soon be launched by India's growing number of unemployed youth. An idea that Chandranath perhaps first developed in the *Shakuntalatattva* returns here with some force and that was the pressing requirement for the Hindu to turn his gaze inward, rather than being consumed by material attractions in the world outside him. The inward gaze, incidentally, carried several meanings, one of which was to effectively reorient Hindu domestic life centered on the selfless services of the ideal wife, back to its traditional moorings.

Chandranath Basu grew into a gifted reviewer of contemporary Bengali literature partly through an acquaintance with Bankim's writings, especially his fiction. Of his close acquaintances and mentors, Bankim was by far the most successful and popular of Bengali fiction writers. Akshay Chandra was more productive with his reviews of books and journals but did not produce any fiction, and Bhudeb was essentially an essayist who occasionally wrote works of fiction.

There is an inner consistency to Chandranath's understanding of contemporary gender relationships, and it is not as though his emergence as a writer of Bengali prose by the early 1880s somehow hardened his feelings. Even at a time when he was writing primarily in English, which would be in the 1870s, the stamp of conservatism is quite unmistakable:

> The romance of Rohini is grossly material, the romance of Bhramar extremely spiritual. We read the former with philosophical interest we

> read the latter with deep moral enthusiasm. We regard the former as an epicurean lyric, we regard the latter as world force. [201]

Sometime before 1900 he was to develop this theme further by comparing two female characters from two well-known novels of Bankim, Suryamukhi from the novel *Bishbriksh* (1873) and Bhramar from *Krishnakanter Will* (1878). This essay is excerpted in this section as C-4.

In Chandranath's reading, the difference between the two characters lay in their resilience and adaptability, in their handling of a comparable crisis in their personal lives. Both women had to suffer heartbreak when their husbands were drawn to an illicit relationship with women who were widowed, Kundanandini in one case and Rohini in the other. In both novels, the men were so powerfully drawn to their clandestine love outside marriage that their wives were practically faced with two options: either to have the other women as a co-wife or else give up the household and their own married lives. Here Chandranath's sympathy was for Suryamukhi, married to Nagendra, who, having realized how passionately her husband loved the other women, decides to get them married on her own initiative. This decision, in Chandranath's reading, was as sagacious as it was practical and productive. It saved Nagendra's household from being wrecked and as matters turned out, also left room for Suryamukhi to return to her husband and renew her conjugal bonds once the co-wife took her own life. However, matters were radically different with Bharamar and her husband, Govindalal. Extremely offended and agitated at her husband choosing to relate to some other woman, Bhramar accused Govindalal of committing *adharma*, violating the sacred marriage vow. She then left Govindalal's company for good, never to return again.

Govindalal's second marriage proved to be a disaster but given the way Bharmar had reacted to his indiscretion, there was no possibility of the couple resettling in married life. The very trauma and shock of it turned Govindalal into a mental wreck, with no friends or material resources to help rehabilitate him. From Chandranath's reading of *Krishnakanter Will* it is pretty obvious that he understood Govindalal's fate to follow almost entirely from Bhramar's stubbornness and lack of pliability. Bhramar, reportedly, was an arrogant woman and her grievance about being unduly wronged, while just on one level left a socially unsalutary message. It was not befitting for women and wives to be so adamant and uncompromising, Chandranath may well have added. Readers may justly speculate if Basu did not also feel that it was Suryamukhi who practically showed greater love, understanding and fidelity towards her husband. For a Hindu woman and wife, Bhramar was evidently much too demanding, self-righteous and self-centered.

D. Thoughts on Language and Literature

Chandranath Basu paid considerable attention to the cause of developing the Bengali language and literature, though this is not often recognized. Though his contribution in this field does not quite match that of some of his illustrious contemporaries, it was nevertheless honest, committed, and useful. Basu did not possess the powers of a gifted storyteller like Bankim, the poetic talent of Madhusudan Dutt or Rabindranath, or the industriousness and organizing capacity of Vidyasagar and yet, he has left behind some observant and insightful thoughts about the contemporary state of Bengali language and literature. This section includes five excerpts, two of which are letters written to Rabindranath (see D-4 and D-5) that comment on matters of literary interest and one on Indian conceptions of history as against the western (D-1).

In literary matters, as can only be expected, Chandranath closely followed the thoughts of Bankim. In the Collected Works of Bankimchandra there are two essays where Bankim deliberates on the objectives and purpose of literature. One of these arrived too late (in 1886) to be of much interest to Chandranath but the other, published in 1872, the year when the journal *Bangadarshan* was launched, would have most certainly influenced him. The latter was an extraordinarily long review of Bhavabhuti's *Uttarramcharita* where Bankim's central argument was that the objectives behind good literature were not simply producing public entertainment and aesthetic beauty. These were certainly important in their own right but had to be ultimately overridden by the affirmation of larger moral imperatives (*neetigyan*). Bankim was to repeat this argument in the 1886 essay titled "Dharma O Sahitya".[202]

In 1880, Chandranath wrote for the *Bangadarshan* an essay titled "Novel baa Kathagranther Uddeshya" (The Objectives behind writing a novel) in which he reiterated Bankim's argument but with a flourish. Interestingly, in this essay, Basu also commented on the literary and social components of the English novel. Rather than choose Samuel Richardson as the pioneer in this field, he preferred Daniel Defoe, in particular his *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and *Mall Flanders* (1722). The reasons that he adduced for his choice are original and insightful. It was Chandranath's belief that as a novelist, Defoe's strength lay in dramatically unearthing the power of human will and individuality but also his penchant for portraying social groups or communities that were new to the western novel: thieves, lechers, prostitutes, and criminals.[203]

D-2 is a hilarious piece from the pen of Chandranath and brings out his power of satirical reproach. The essay is based on a conversation that reportedly took place between the Indologist Colebrook and the Hindu scholar, Pundit Jagannath Tarkapanchanan. There is no way of telling if

the conversation actually transpired or remains a work of fiction. Perhaps the latter is the case and yet, in the essay, Chandranath brings out some serious reflections in an enjoyably jocular vein. The conversation between the two figures hinges on an older question as to whether the Hindus at all had a sense of history or historically authentic narratives to boast of. Colebrook, for example, believes that the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* were not histories but works of poetry. Also under debate is the importance of the empirical habits of the mind, of the meticulousness with which historical moments must be recorded in the smallest detail. The Pundit, greatly amused by the sheer weight of Colebrook's discourse reveals a mock seriousness but finally calls it a day suggesting that the Hindu and European had better continue to operate within their respective knowledge systems to which they were accustomed.

The debate incidentally, also touches upon the European obsession with individuality and what Pandit Jagannath calls, an obsession with biographies. This is an argument that even otherwise occurs at several places in Chandranath's writings. His unhappiness, on the whole, is with the anthropomorphism of the Western civilization, the tendency to make man the measure of all things. The Hindu, if we are to believe Basu, took a more cosmic view and was less certain about historical events being determined by man alone. D-2 develops this argument further and here too, the central argument is that Sanskrit literature and the Hindu tradition was not any poorer on account of the paucity of biographies. Europeans are accused of wantonly adding extravagant details,[204] of plagiarism and what is more, of sheer redundancy. Europeans sought changes in ordinary life purely for the sake of change, (an accusation as readers might recall he levels in his autobiography), they are also driven to wantonly glorify themselves and their chosen subjects. What did Messon's life of Milton especially add to what was already publicly known, he complains?[205] Puranic accounts, rather than be pure myths, were chronicles of diverse human experiences where the social collective assumed greater importance than the private individual. Here it might also be worth referring to Chandranath's very different understanding of both the art of biography writing and the intrinsic worth of European lives. It is somewhat puzzling that he did not publicly oppose the school textbooks of Vidyasagar in which moral pedagogy was drawn entirely from the lives of European men. This is surprising all the more as one of his mentors, Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay, openly critiqued the exclusion of any Indian lives for books meant to be read by Indian children.[206]

As a member of the Central Text Book Committee, Chandranath's attention was naturally drawn to questions affecting the improvement of the Bengali language. In this matter, he found himself confronting two major problems: first, intra-provincial differences in spoken and written Bengali and second, the stylistic differences transparent between the language

produced by the broadly two classes of writers who produced it, the western educated Babu and the traditional literati. Colloquialism and differences in idioms and intonation apparently rendered the language of east Bengal districts unintelligible to those inhabiting Calcutta and its immediate neighborhood. It was Basu's recommendation that Calcutta as the major center of book production in Bengal should take the lead in standardizing the Bengali language, at least for the purposes of pedagogy. The neo-educated he found grammatically weak, but enterprising and elegant, the traditional literati, accomplished but irritatingly verbose. Such problems, he hoped, would be effectively resolved through the intervention of the Bengal Academy of Letters (*Bangiya Sahitya Parishat*).

Although Chandranath's literary oeuvre was to a great extent fashioned by Bankim, there appear to be interesting exceptions. In one instance, he is known to have accused his friend of unnecessarily subjecting his characters from novels to didacticism derived elsewhere. In his view, the female character Prafulla in the novel *Debi Chaudhurani* need not have been subjected to his theory of *anusilan* or the disciplining of all human faculties[207] that he developed in the *Dharmatattva*. This would prove both that Chandranath could indeed choose to differ from Bankim when necessary and that despite speaking to the contrary, he did believe in the aesthetic autonomy of a literary work like the novel. Another such instance comes to light over his reading of the novel *Anandamath* (see D-4). Here he concurs with Tagore in arguing that Bankim's idealism had created a very untypically Indian female character in Santi. In line with some other well-known contemporaries, Chandranath characterized the "Mother" symbolism in the novel as reflecting spurious patriotism, with no foundation in Hindu culture. Only two of several letters written by Chandranath Basu to Rabindranath have been recovered. Of these, one has been reproduced in this section as D-5 in translation. If anything, it points to the genuine regard that Basu had of Rabindranath as a friend and poet, notwithstanding a long history of debates and differences. It would appear as though both men were genial, candid, forgiving, and figures who actively shared a cause larger than themselves.

Notes

1 Both excerpts above are in my translation.
2 The argument is best represented in Tapan Raychaudhuri: *Europe Considered. Perceptions of the West in Nineteenth Century Bengal*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2nd Impression. 1989: 1–23.
3 See Varuni Bhatia: *Unforgetting Chaitanya. Vaishnavism and Cultures of Devotion in Colonial Bengal*. Oxford. Oxford University Press. 2017. See Introduction.
4 For summary see Introduction to my *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal. 1872–1905. Some Essays in Interpretation*. Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1993.

5 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters on Hinduism" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanbali*. Vol. III. Calcutta. Sahitya Samsad. 1969: 235.
6 See his Introduction to the unfinished commentary on the *Bhagavadgita*. Reproduced in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Calcutta. Sahitya Samsad. Vol. II. 2004: 616–17.
7 Bruce Carlisle Robertson: *Raja Rammohun Roy. The Father of Modern India*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 1995: 162, 178.
8 Tanika Sarkar: "Chandranath Basur Hindutva. Bangali Adhuniktar Arekti Itihas" in *Kolcata 21*. Bhadra 1429 (August–September, 2022): 65–88.
9 Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal. 1872–1905. Some Essays in Interpretation*. Delhi. Oxford University Press, 1993.
10 See Amiya P. Sen: "A Hindu Conservative Negotiates Modernity. Chandranath Basu (1844–1910) and Reflections on the self and Culture" in Rafael Klober and Manju Ludwig ed. *Her Story-Historical Scholarship between South Asia and Europe*. Heidelberg. Cross Asia Books. 2018: 178.
11 Sunityranjan Raychaudhuri: *Unisher Shatake Nabya Hindu Andoloner Koyekjon Nayak*. Calcutta. GAE Publishers. 1960.
12 Tanika Sarkar: *Hindu Nationalism in India*. London. Hurst & Co. 2021: 178, fn1.
13 Tanika Sarkar: "Chandranath Basur Hindutva": 75.
14 Tanika Sarkar: "Chandranath Basur Hindutva": 76.
15 Tanika Sarkar: "Chandranath Basur Hindutva": 77.
16 Chandrnanath Basu cited in Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal*: 152. Translation mine. Mohanlal handled the artillery of the Nawab.
17 Bhudeb Mukhopadhaya: "Vividha Prabandha" (II) in Manaswita Sanyal and Ranjan Bandopadhyay eds. *Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay. Prabandha Samagra*. Kolkata. Charchapada. 2010: 568–79.
18 See Amiya P. Sen: *Vidyasagar. Reflections on a Notable Life*. Hyderabad. Orient Blackswan. 2022: 94–144.
19 Amiya P. Sen: *Vidyasagar*. See Chapter 5: "Vidyasagar and the Woman Question."
20 Loknath Basu: *Hindu Dharma Marma*. Calcutta. Priyanath Basu. 3rd ed. 1897: 75–76.
21 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Gourdas Babjir Bhikkha Jhuli" Originally published in *Bibibdha Prabandh*a Part II (1892) and reproduced in *Bankim Rachanbali* Ed J.C. Bagal. Sahitya Samsad Edition. Vol. II. 2004: 229–35.
22 A relevant passage on this subject is excerpted in Part II.
23 The classic instance of such an enterprise occurs in his essay "Shakuntala, Miranda and Desdemona". Originally appeared in *Bibidha Prabanda* Part I (1887) and reproduced in *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 179–183.
24 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Utility ba Udar Darsha" in Kamalakanter Daptar: J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 50–51.
25 "Mashik Sanvad" (1888) Reproduced in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 644–845.
26 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Prachina Ebong Nabina" (*Vividha Probondho*-I) in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 217–19.
27 See excerpts in Part II.
28 See Part II for the excerpt titled "Two Hindu Wives" based on characters from Bankim's novels.
29 See Part II for details of this controversy.
30 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: *Dharmatattva*: Chapters 10 to 20.
31 These are respectively, the *Paribarik Prabandha*, *Samajik Prabandha,* and *Achar Prabandha*.

32 Prasannatara Gupta: *Paribark Jeebon*. Cuttack. Ananatanarayan Sen. 1903 In his Introduction Chandranath could not help the snide remark that Gupta's Brahmo co-religionists would indeed resent her approval of most rules of domestic economy framed by the Hindu orthodoxy.
33 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Bransonism" (Lokrahasya l), "Muchiram Guder Jeeboncharit" both included in *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II.
34 The event occurred in 1883 and involved the emerging nationalist leader, Surenranath Banerjee. It was commonly known as the "Judge Norris Case" after the name of the sitting judge who tried the case. The affront and resentment that this caused is well described in Bipinchandra Pal: *Memories of My Life and Times*. Calcutta. Modern Book Agency. 1932. See Chapter XXII.
35 Brajendranath Bandopadhyay: *Bangla Samayik Patra*. Vol II. Calcutta. Bangiya Sahitya parishat. 1978: 104.
36 Loknath Basu: *Hindu Dharma Marma*. Calcutta. Priyanath Basu. 3rd ed. 1897: See Preface.
37 The reference here is to his novel *Anandamath*.
38 For a modern nationalist reading of Chaitanya's life and work see Amiya P. Sen: *Chaitanya. A Life and Legacy*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2019. Chapter 5.
39 The *Samajik Prabandha* was serialized in the journal *Education Gazette* between 1887 and 1889 and published as a book in 1892. Reproduced in Prmathanath Bishi Ed, *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*. Calcutta. Mitra & Ghosh. 1968: 1–235.
40 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay; "Samajik Prabandha" in Pramathanath Bishi ed. *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*. Calcutta. Mitra & Ghosh. 1968: 49.
41 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters on Hinduism" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanaali*. Calcutta. Sahitya Samsad. Vol. III: 170–184.
42 Amiya P. Sen ed. *Bankim's Hinduism. An Anthology of Writings by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay*. Ranikhet. Permanent Black. 2011: 4.
43 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters on Hinduism": 237.
44 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters on Hinduism": 236.
45 For a useful study of this theme, see Ankur Barua: "Vedantic Variations in the Presence of Europe: Establishment of the Hindu Dharma in Nineteenth Century Bengal" in *International Journal of Dharma Studies*, 5:10 (2017): 1–22.
46 Amiya P. Sen: *Explorations in Modern Bengal c.1800–1900. Essays on Religion, Society and Culture*. Delhi. Primus Books. 2010: 130.
47 Loknath Basu: *Hindu Dharma Marma*. Calcutta. Priyaath Basu. 1856.
48 Akshaykumar Datta: *Dharmaneeti*. Calcutta. Sanskrit Press. 1863.
49 Rajnarayan Basu: *Dharmatattvadipika*. Calcutta. Girish Press. 1866.
50 Indranath Basu: *HIndudharmaneeti*. Majumdar Press. 1872. This work underwent at least three editions, the third in 1900.
51 Pandit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani: *Dharmavyakhya*. Vol. 1, parts 1-5. Caccutta. Bhudhar Chattopadhaya. Bangabasi Steam Press. 1884. The work appears to have been reprinted in 1910.
52 See *Dharmavyakhya*. Vol. 1, part 1, Chapter 18. The chapter itself carries this title.
53 *Dharmavyakhya*. Vol. 1, part 2, pg. 58.
54 *Dharmavyakhya*. Vol. 1, part 3, pp 27–28.
55 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Bangalir Jatiya Jeebon O Hemchandra" included in Kalidas Nag ed. *Akshay Sahityasambhar*. Calcutta. Indian Associated Publishers. 2 Vols, 1966, Vol. II: 583.
56 Sri Aurobindo: "Amader Dharma" (Dharma O Jatiyata) included in Sri Aurobindo: *Writings in Bengali and Sanskrit. Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*. Pondicherry. Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust. Vol. 9: 2017: 77.

57 See Appendix B of "Dharmatattva" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Calcutta. Sahitya Samsad. Vol. II. 2004.
58 *Dharmavyakhya*. Part V.
59 Sen, *Hindu Revivalism*: 233.
60 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Jatiya Jeebon" in *Akshay Sahityrsambhar*: II: 582.
61 Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 66. Translation mine.
62 Swagato Ganguly: *Idolatry and the Colonial Idea. Visions of Horror. Allegories of Enlightenment*. London and New York. Routledge: 163–164.
63 The National Mela came to be called the Hindu Mela from 1872, about the time when Basu was finishing his *Hindudhrmer Sresthata*.
64 The National Anthem was to be collated from Sanskrit invocations to Bharatvarsha by Swami Dayanand. See Rajnaryan Basu: *Hindudharmer Sresthata*. Calcutta. National Press. 1794 Shak. (1872): Preface and Introduction; Old Hindu (Rajnarayan Basu): *Old Hindu's Hope. For the Establishment of a Hindu National Congress*. Calcutta. G.C. Bose & Co. 1888: 1–16; Appendix No. 1.
65 See Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism in Bengal*. Chapter 4.
66 Thomas Blom Hansen: *The Saffron Wave. Democracy and Hindu Nationalism*. Princeton. Princeton University Press. 1999; Jyotirmaya Sharma: *Hindutva. Exploring the Idea of Hindu Nationalism*. Delhi. Penguin Books. 2003; Christophe Jeffrelot ed.: *Hindu Nationalism. A Reader*. Ranikhet. Permanent Black. 2007; Aparna Devare: *History and the Making of the Modern Hindu Self*. Delhi. Routledge. 2011; Chetan Bhatt: *Hindu Nationalism. Origins, Ideologies and Modern Myths*. London & New York. Routledge. 2020; John Zavos: "The Arya Samaj and the antecedents of Hindu Nationalism" in *International Journal of Hindu Studies*, 3:1 (April 1999): 57–81.
67 Chetan Bhatt: *Hindu Nationalism*: 43.
68 Jyotirmaya Sharma: *Hindutva*. (chapters 2–4).
69 Parimala V. Rao: *Foundations of Tilak's Nationalism, Education and Hindutva*. Hyderabad. Orient Blackswan. 2010: 280–282. Rao claims that by 1887, Tilak was beginning to treat Hindus and Muslims as two distinct communities.
70 J.C.Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. I: 695.
71 Rajnarayan Basu: *Briddha Hindur Asha*. Excerpted in Jogeshchandra Bagal: *Rajnarayan Basu. Sahitya Sadhak Charitramala*, no.49. Calcutta. Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. 1973: 94–95.
72 J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachaabali*. Vol. II: 587.
73 See Brahmabandhab Upadhyay: "The One Centeredness of the Hindu Race" (originally "Hindujatir Eknishtata") first published I *Bangadarshan*: April-May 1901 and "Varnashramdarma, first appeared in B*angadarshan* February-March, 1902; reproduced in Julius Lipner and George Gispert-Sauch eds. *The Writings of Brahmabandhab Upadhyay*. Bangalore. The United Theological College. Vol. II: 115, 159 respectively.
74 Rabindranath Tagore: "Vidyasagar Charit" (Charitpurja) first published in 1895, Reproduced in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Calcutta. VIsvabharati. 2004. Vol. 2: 767–786; "Brahman (Bharatvarsha) first appeared in 1902, Reproduced in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. 2: 709–716; "Hindu Viswavidyalay", (Parichay) first appeared in 1911. Reproduced in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. 9: 605–609; "Atmaparichay" (1912). Reproduced in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. 9: 512–603.
75 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Dharmatattva" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 557.
76 Vrndavan Das: *Chaitanya Bhagavata*. Sukumar Sen ed. Delhi. Sahitya Akademi. 2nd reprint. 1991. See Glossary and Madhya Khanda which describes in vivid

detail intermittent conflicts between local Vaishnavas and state officials of Nabadwip.

77 Bipinchandra Pal: *Nobojuger Bangla*. Calcutta. Yugayatri. 1955: 179.

78 Rammohun Roy: *A Defence of Hindu Theism* cited in Amiya P. Sen: *Explorations in Modern Bengal. C. 1800-1900. Essays on Religion, History and Culture*. Delhi. Primus Books. 2010: 25.

79 Guru Prosad Sen: *An Introduction to the Study of Hinduism*. Calcutta. Thacker Spink & Co. 1893: 9, 15, 164. Guru Prosad Sen (1843–1900) was a successful lawyer and journalist who founded the Behar Herald. The essay was earlier serialized in *The Calcutta Review* in 1890. Tagore himself was to repeat this idealistic argument in 1911. See Rabindranath Tagore: "Do Hindu Brahmos Qualify to be Called Hindus?" cited in Amiya P. Sen: *Religion and Rabindranath Tagore*. Select Discourses, Addresses and Letters. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2014: 141–52.

80 Sister Nivedita: "Interview with the Swami Vivekananda on the bounds of Hinduism" cited in Amiya P. Sen: *An Idealist in India. Selected Writings and Speeches of Sister Nivedita*. Delhi. Primus Books. 2016: 137.

81 Rabindranath Tagore's letter of 10th October, 1933 cited in Amiya P. Sen: *Religion and Rabindranath Tagore*: 218–219.

82 Vinayak Damodar Savarkar: *Hindutva. Who Is a Hindu?* 5th reprint. Bombay. Savarkar.

83 Savarkar: *Hindutva*: 4.

84 Arvind Sharma: "On the Difference between Hinduism and Hindutva" in *Education about Asia* (Spring 2020): 43–46.

85 Sharma: "On the Differences": 44.

86 On the contrary, Basu cites food habits among Muslims as object lessons for the Hindus. See excerpts on the "Hindu Diet" included in Part II.

87 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Viividh Prabandha". II: 582–83; "Samajik Prabandha": 13.

88 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Pushpanjali". Reproduced in *Bhudeb Rahanasambhar*: 375–441.

89 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Swapnalabdha Bharatvarsher Itihas". Reproduced in *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar:* 341–374.

90 Rajnarayan Basu: "Ascharya Swapna" in *Vividha Prabandha*. Vol. I. Calcutta. 1891: 94.

91 See his articles carried in the daily Bengali paper S*adharani* of 18 April 81 and 28 July 83. Reprinted in *Akshay Sahityasambhar*: II; 849.

92 Rajnarayan Basu: *Vividha Prabandha*. I: 15 (see footnote).

93 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Swadeshi". Originally published in the daily *Bangabasi* 2nd Ashad, 1320Bs (June–July, 1906) in *Akshay Sahityasambhar*: II; 773.

94 Rajnarayan Basu: *Old Hindu's Hope*: 15, 30, 39.

95 Guru Prosad Sen: *An Introduction to the Study of Hinduism*: 135, 204.

96 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Samajik Prabandha" in *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*: 18.

97 Rajnarayan Basu: *Old Hindu's Hope*: 1–3.

98 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Samajik Prabandha" in *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*: 19.

99 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Devtattva O Hindudharma" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 707.

100 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters on Hinduism" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. III: 228.

101 Jyotirmaya Sharma: *A Restatement of Religion. Swami Vivekananda and the Making of Hindu Nationalism*. Yale University Press. 2013: xiv–xv.

102 Anantanand Rambachan: "Hinduism, Hindutva and the Contest for the Meaning of Hindu Identity. Swami Vivekananda and V.D. Savarkar" in Sukalyan Sengupta and Makarand Paranjape eds. *The Cyclonic Swami. Vivekananda in the West*. Delhi. Samvad India Foundation. 2005: 121–28.
103 Swami Vivekananda: "Lectures from Colombo to Almora" in *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Calcutta. Advaita Ashrama. Mayavati Memorial Edition. Vol. III. 1972: 104–105.
104 Amiya P. Sen: *Rammohun Roy. A Critical Biography*. Delhi. Penguin Viking. 2012: 83.
105 See, for example his "Second Appeal to the Christian Public" (1821) cited in Swagato Ganguly: *Idolatry and the Colonial Idea of India*: 166.
106 See the *Shri Shri Ramakrishnakathamrita* cited in Amiya P. Sen: *His Words. The Parables and Preachings of Ramakrishna Paramahamsa*. Delhi. Penguin Viking. 2012: 221.
107 Swami Vivekananda cited in Amiya P. Sen: *The Indispensable Vivekananda. An Anthology for Our Times*. Delhi. Permanent Black. 2006: 34, Footnote 66.
108 Swami Vivekananda cited in Sen: *The Indispensable Vivekananda:* 16.
109 Swami Vivekananda: *Prachya O Paschatya*. Calcutta. Udbodhan Press. 12th reprint. 1939: 13. Originally appeared in the journal *Udbodhan* between 1901 and 1902.
110 Rajnarayan Basu: "Arya Jatir Utpatti O Vistar" in *Vividha Prabandha*. Vol. I: 49–50.
111 "Reminiscences of Swami Vivwkananda" cited in Amiya P. Sen: *Swami Vivekananda*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2000: 88. This appears to have preempted Savarkar's view that regarding the territorial boundaries of Hindutva: "The only geographical limit of Hindutva are the limits of our earth" See V.D. Savarkar: *Hindutva*. Bombay. Veer Savarkar Prakashan. 1969 reprint: 116.
112 The latter he left to Sister Nivedita to expand upon. A tract by this name was published by G.A. Natesan of Madras in 1905. Excerpted in Amiya P. Sen ed.: *An Idealist in India. Selected Writings and Speeches of Sister Nivedita*. Delhi. Primus Books. 2016: 134–136.
113 Rajnarayan Basu: "Arya Jatir Utkarsha O Vikas" in *Vividha Prabandha*. Vol. I: 67.
114 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Kabi Hemchandra" in *Akshay Sahityasambhar*. Vol. II: 583.
115 Swami Vivekananda: "Lectures from Colombo to Almora" *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Vol. III: 105.
116 Jyotirmaya Sharma: A *Restatement of Religion*: 154.
117 See Note 106 above.
118 Bipinchandra Pal: *The Spirit of Indian Nationalism. With an Introduction by W.T. Stead*. London. Hindu National Agency. 1910: 11.
119 "With other people, religion is only a part of life, there are things religious and there are things lay and secular. To the Hindu, his whole life was religion" See Bankimchandra Chattopadyay: "Letters on Hinduism" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. III: 230.
120 Bipin Chandra Pal: *The Soul of India. Constructive Study of Indian Thought and Ideals*. Calcutta. Chaudhury & Chaudhury: 192–193.
121 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Kabi Hemchandra". *Akshay Sahityasambhar*. Vol. II: 582–583.
122 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Swadeshi" first appeared in the daily B*angabasi* 2 Ashad, 1313 BS (June–July, 1906) and reprinted in *Akshay Sahityasambhar*. Vol. II: 773.

123 Chandranath Basu: *Pritivir Sukha Dukkha*. Calcutta. Bhattacharya & Sons. 1908.
124 Biographical details of Chandranath's early life are culled from Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu:* 38–82; Brajendranath Bandopadhyay: "Chandranath Basu, Nabakrishna Bhattacharya, Khetramohan Sengupta" in *Shahitya Shadhak Charitramala*, No. 83. Calcutta. Bangiya Shahitya Parishat. 2nd ed. 1962.
125 See the autobiographical fragment included in Part II.
126 Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 48. Translation mine.
127 Of his wife Chandranath speaks thus, "By God's grace, I have been blessed with extraordinary luck when it came to choosing a wife for myself". Cited in Majumdar: *Chanderanath Basu*: 80. The couple had twelve children in all.
128 Chandranath Basu: *Pritivir Sukha Dukkha*: 37, 42, 74–75.
129 Chandranath met Bankim for the first time in 1875 at the second college reunion organized by the Brahmo leader Rajnarayan Basu. Recalling his first meeting with Bankim, Chandranath Basu writes: "Upon sighting him (Bankim Babu), I ran to him and said 'I did not know that you were Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay. Can I have the pleasure of a handshake again?' He smiled quite gracefully and extended his hand. The warmths of his hands has stayed with me since". Cited in Majumdar *Chandranath Basu*: 62 (translation mine). In 1898, Chandranath wrote a very personalized essay on his close association with Bankim under the title "Bandhubatsal Bankimchandra": (The Friendly Bankimchandra) reproduced in Sureshchandra Samajpati ed. *Bankim Prasanga*a. Calcutta. Nabapatra Prakashan. 1982.
130 The political satire, *Pashupatisamvad* (1884) which mocks the "spurious" patriotism of the English educated Babu. The work displeased Bankim and partly on this account and the mounting arrears of subscription, Bankim temporarily discontinued the publication of the *Bangadarshan* in early 1884. The journal appeared in a new incarnation with Tagore as the editor in 1901.
131 At the time it was fashionable for young Hindus to wear glasses in the manner of Keshabchandra, who had a large following among the youth.
132 Perhaps the best known instance of this ridicule and animosity occurs in Jogendrachandra's highly popular novel, *Model Bhagini* (1885). The novel underwent at least 12 reprints by 1902. See Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism,* Chp. 4.
133 Cited in Majumdar *Chandranath Basu*. 107. Basu also mentions another article titled *Political Economy and the Famines of Bengal,* reportedly published in the *Hindoo Patriot* (date unknown). See, Karunamoy Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 105–106.
134 The above articles identified by the government as objectionable material were as follows: *Igrajer Bikat Murti* (The terrifying Image of the Engishma), *Amader Abastha* (Our Present Condition) both of 28th March, 1891; *Hindur Prothom o Pradhan Dharana* (The First and Foremost Objective before the Hindu) of 13 May 1891; *Parinam Kee* (What are the consequences) *Asabhyer Pokkhe Akapat Neeti Bhalo* (For the uncivilized honesty is the best policy) of 13 June 1891. The proceedings against the *Bangabasi* began on 25 August 1891.
135 Swami Vivekananda cited in Amiya P. Sen ed.: *Social and Religious Reform. The Hindus of British India*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2006: 67–69.
136 Max Muller to Malabari, letter reproduced in *Amrit Bazar Patrika* of 22 July, 1886, cited in Sunitiranjan Raychaudhuri: *Nabya Hindu*: 31.
137 W. Wedderburn cited in Sunitiranjan Raychaudhuri: *Nabya Hindu*: 31.
138 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Hindu Parinay Patha" in Kalidas Nag ed. *Akshay Sahitya Sambhar.* Calcutta. Indian Assciated Press. Vol. I. 1965: 179–181.

139 Akshay Chandra Sarkar: "Hindu Vidhabar Abar Viviva Howa Uchit kina". Reproduced in *Akshay Sahitya Sambhar*. Vol. I: 170–178.
140 Akshay Chandra Sarkar. *Hindu Vivavaha* (1887). Reprinted from the journal *Nabajeebon*.
141 For details of these controversies, see relevant excerpts included in Part II and the commentary thereupon.
142 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "A Pointless Debate". Excerpted from his unfinished commentary on the Bhagavadgita. Reproduced in translation in Amiya P. Sen ed.: *Bankim's Hinduism. An Anthology of Writings by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay*. Ranikhet. Permanent Black. 2011: 196–198. Translation mine.
143 See the poem "Parityakta" included in the anthology "Manasi" (1890). *Rabindran Rachanabali*. Vol. I. 2004 312. See also Tagore's faulting Bankim's hermeneutic freedom in "Adi Brahmo Samaj O Nabya Hindu Sampraday" originally published in the journal *Prachar* in 1885 and reprinted in J.C. Bagal ed.: *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 837–843.
144 Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism*: 166.
145 Reportedly, such sentiments were echoed by his great-grandchild too. See Amiya P. Sen: *Hindu Revivalism*: 159.
146 For a general critique of pseudo-scientific attitudes, see his "Indriyer Akankha" included in Chandranath Basu: *Tridhara*. Calcutta. Haranath Basu. 3rd ed. 1907: 40–48.
147 Widely recommended by Hindu law books, the custom of garbhadan required the father to get his daughters married before they showed symptoms of attaining the age of puberty. Violation of this custom was held to bring great calamity on the father. In Bengal, a girl was ideally married off before reaching the age of eight. This practice was called Gauridaan (the gifting of the fair daughter).
148 Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva*: 167.
149 Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva*: 189.
150 Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva*: 168.
151 See for instance Swami Vivekananda in his *Prachya O Paschatya*: 50.
152 For Rajnarayan Basu, see his *Hindudharmer Sresthata*. Calcutta. National Press. 1872; *Old Hindu's Hope for the Establishment of a Hindu National Congress*. Calcutta. G.C. Bose & Co. 1888. For Bankim, see his *Dharmatattva*. Chapter 25 reprinted in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol II.
153 See part III of Pundit Shasadhar's *Dharmavyakjya*.
154 Composed in 1892 and included in the anthology *Sonar Tari*. See *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 2004: 26–30.
155 See Bipin Chandra Pal: *Memories of My Life and Times*. Calcutta. Modern Book Agency. 1932: 439.
156 Pal: *Memories*: 432.
157 Nagendranath Gupta (1861–1940), a well known author and journalist who knew Rabindranath well, observed in an article published in *Sahitya* in 1893 that of the two, Rabindranath was the more vocal in debate. The historian Ramaprasad Chanda (1873–1942) remarked in the journal *Masik Basumati* that in his debates with Chandranath, Tagore had failed to show liberality and grace. He also went on to say that the difference of opinion was not the sole cause behind this illiberality. See Majumdar: Chandranath Basu: 69–70.
158 Tagore's letter published under the title "Rabindranababur Patra" in *Sahitya* Baisakh 1300 BS (April-May 1893) cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 72.
159 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Adi Brahmo Samaj O Nabya Indu Sampraday", originally appeared in the journal *Prochar* and reproduced in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanavali*. Vol. II: 837–842.

160 Tagore's letter to Pramatha Chaudhury of 29th January, 1898 cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 73. Translation mine.
161 Two of Chandranath's letters to Tagore are reproduced in translation in Part II.
162 In this too he appears to have echoed Bhudeb whose diary entry of 17 July 1891 reads as follows: "The deepest roots of the Banyan tree representing Sanatan Dharma are founded in a belief in after life. These roots can never be destroyed though some woodpeckers have carved out a few small holes in its mighty trunk" Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 148. Translation mine.
163 The expression is Sudipta Kaviraj's/ See Sudipta Kaviraj: *The Imaginary Institution of India: Politics and Ideas*. New York. Columbia University Press. 2010: 287.
164 This argument is particularly well developed in Gayatri Bhattacharya: *The First Indian Social Theorist. Ideas of Bhudeb Chandra Mukhopadhyay*. Calcutta. University of Calcutta. 2012. See especially Introduction and Appendices. Bhudeb's granddaughter, Anurupa Devi speaks of this at length in her article "Mahatma Bhudeb O Kurmaneeti ba Kamath britti" in *Bangabani*. Sravan, 1330 BS (July–August, 1923). Cited in Annexure II.
165 Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu:* 151.
166 University of Calcutta. Convocation Addresses, Vol. IV. 1900–1914. Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 81oipku.
167 See Amiya P. Sen: *Bankim's Hinduism: An Anthology of Writings by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay*. Ranikhet. Permanent Black. 2011.
168 Chandranath Basu: *Chandrakona*. Calcutta. Students Library. 3rd ed. 1919: 96–121.
169 Chandranth Basu: *Prithivir Sukh Dukha*. Calcutta. Debendranath Bhattacharya. 1908.
170 See M. (Mahendranath Gupta): *Sri Sri Ramakrishnakathamrita*. Calcutta. Kathamrita Bhavan. 1993 reprint, Vol. 5: 196.
171 See Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 140.
172 See Amiya P. Sen ed. *Social and Religious Reform. The Hindus of British India*: 93–97.
173 Chandranath Basu: "Putra" in Hindutva: 127.
174 For Pal's ideas, see *his The Soul of India*: 31, 90, 105; *Nationality and Empire: A Running Study of Some Current Indian Problems*. Calcutta and Simla. Thacker & Dpink. 1916: 35.
175 Savarkar: *Hindutva*: 93.
176 Chandranath writes: "Literature bears testimony not simply to sundry activities but many things more. It bears testimony to strength and intelligence, hopes, ideals and aspirations, relating to the past, present and future pertaining to our race. It is only the characteristic qualities identified with a nation that gives birth to national literature". See Excerpts B-9 in Part II. My translation.
177 "Hindutva": Critical Notice: xv–xvi.
178 Bipinchandra Pal: *The Soul of India*: 166.
179 I have developed this point from the lead provided by Swagato Ganguly in the context of Rammohun Roy. See Swagato Ganguly: *Idolatry and the Colonial Idea*: 159.
180 Mahendranath Gupta: *Shri Shri Ramakrishnakathamrita*. Vol. III: 7.
181 Harimohan reports Chandranath admitting to the following: "Bankim Babu said I too used to hate the caste system but having read your essay my view have now undergone a change" cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 218.
182 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: *Dharmatattva* in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: Chapters 22, 28. *Karma Yoga* was one of the earliest

published works of Vivekananda in 1901. See *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Vol. I.

183 Bipinchandra Pal: *The Soul of India*: 262f.

184 Bankim recommended that affluent Hindus ought to get their idols made in Europe. See Letters in the Hastie Controversy. In J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. III: 216.

185 A typical example of meticulous deliberation on the scriptural support behind early marriages in girls was published well after Chandranath's major writings on Hindu marriages and conjugality. My reference here is to Bhuvaneswar Mitra: *Hindu Kanya Vivaha kon somoy hole shatrasammata? Ritu lakhher purbe naa pore?* (What is the ideal age for marrying girls according to Hindu Shastras? Before appearance of menses or after?). Calcutta. Great Indian Press. 1898. A copy sold for 4 annas.

186 Swami Vivekananda: "The Mission of the Vedanta" and "My Plan of Campaign" in *Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*. Vol. III: 194–196, 231–40.

187 Sri Aurobindo: "The Samatan Dharma and the Awakening of India" cited in Peter Heehs ed.: *Nationalism, Religion and Beyond*: 220. Vivekananda had anticipated this by the remark that "the prosperity of a nation (could not) be judged by the number of husbands its widows get".

188 See Introduction to this volume above.

189 Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay: "Samajik Prabandha" in *Bhudeb Rachanasambhar*: 217.

190 Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 227.

191 Rabindranath Tagore: "Nobo Dampatir Premalap" (1881) in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. I: 323–325.

192 "Sakuntalatattva and Savitritattva will be counted as classics in our language by generations of our countrymen" See Introduction to Chandranath Basu's *Chandrakona*. 3rd ed. 1919: vii.

193 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Shakuntala, Miranda o Desdemena" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 179–183; Rabindranath Tagore: "Kumarsmabhav and Shakuntala" and "Shakuntala" both from 1902 and reproduced in *Rabindra RachanabalI*. Vol. III: 717–723 and 723–733 respectively.

194 Summary of the *Mahabharata* as it appears in Kaliprasanna Singha's well-known Bengali translation: chapters 68–74. See Kaliprasanna Singha: *Mahabharat*. Calcutta. Tuli Kalam. 1987.

195 Chandranath Basu: *Shakuntalatattva Arthat Abhigyan Shakuntalar Samalochana*. Calcutta. Jogesh Bhattachar 1884: 65.

196 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Shakuntala, Miranda O Desdemona" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 181.

197 Rabindranath Tagore: "Ramabaier Batrita Upalakkhe" (1889) in *Rabindra Rachanabali*. Vol. VI: 678–681.

198 See Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: "Letters in the Hastie Controversy" in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. III: 212.

199 Chandranath's biographer traces such beliefs from the influences that Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay cast on him. Bhudeb's diary entry of 12th July, 1891 notes the following: "Our Sanatan Dharma can be likened to a grand Banyan tree with its roots spread out deep and wide. One of its deepest roots has to do with faith in after life. This grand old tree is imperishable; some mischievous wood peckers have only managed to create some tiny holes in its trunk" cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 148. Translation mine. It is quite possible that in this belief Chandranath was also under the influence of Theosophy which had grown popular in Bengal at the time.

200 Tagores' rejoinder to Chandranath Basu is available in English translation in Amiya P. Sen ed.: *Social and Religious Reform. The Hindus of British India*. Delhi. Oxford University Press. 2nd Reprint. 2006: 156–161.
201 Cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 109.
202 Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay: *Uttarcharit: Bangadarshan*: Aswin 1279 BS (September, 1872) "Dharma O Sahitya" originally published in the journal *Prochar*: Pous 1292 BS (January 1886), reproduced in J.C. Bagal ed. *Bankim Rachanabali*. Vol. II: 141–163 and 224–225 respectively.
203 Chandranath Basu: "Novel baa Kathagranther Uddeshya": originally appeared in the journal *Bangadarshan* Baisakh, 1287 BS (April–May, 1880) summarized in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 223–224.
204 Tagore is known to have made the following remark: "By amassing a great amount of authentic facts one may truly construct a memorial not a life history". See Rabindranath Tagore: "Paschim Jatrir Diary" Diary entry of 27 September 1924 cited in Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 234. Translation mine.
205 Here the reference is to David Messon's *The Life of John Milton. Narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical and Literary History of His Times*. London. 1871.
206 See Amiya P. Sen: *Vidyasagar. Reflections on a Notable Life*. Hyderabad. Orient Blackswan. 2021 Chapter 3.
207 Majumdar claims that he expressed this in a letter of 9 October 1884. See Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu*: 247.

PART II

Selected Writings

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A
Autobiographical

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1

REMINISCENCES OF MY CHILDHOOD

*I developed problems with my eyesight when I was thirty five. I could not quite see objects at a distance. At the time this particular malady was called "short sight", now it is called "near sight". I do not understand what advantage someone might have possibly derived by substituting "short" by "near". The English people have brought about several superficial changes of this kind; change for the sake of change is now a common habit with them. It is almost an addiction. All my life I have heard them say "He did his best"; now this has been changed to "He did his level best". Why the word "level" had to be inserted I do not quite understand. After he had embraced Christianity, my dear friend, the late Kalicharan Bandopadhyay[1] mastered the English language and made his acquaintance with many Englishmen. Even he was unable to explain why the word "level" had to be inserted into the expression. Hence, I have come to believe that this is but an instance of involuntarily cultivated habit … by coming into contact with those whose for whom change for the sake of change has been the driving spirit in everyday life, we Indians too have forsaken much that was good in our lives only to accept the unwholesome and the useless. And like those whom we thoughtlessly imitate we delude ourselves with the thought that we have successfully replaced all that was petty and lifeless with that which is living, dynamic, and grand. I did develop short sight but did not for that reason take to wearing glasses. My reasons were twofold. First, at the time all those wearing glasses were taken to be Brahmos[2] and I had no intentions of being counted as one among

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: *Prithivir Sukha Dukkha* (reprinted from *Sa-hitya Patrika*) Calcutta. Debendranath Bhattacharya. 1908: 1–114.

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them. Second, some friends helped me understand understand that the problem with my vision would correct itself over time and that wearing glasses would only retard this natural process. Under the belief that medication did more harm than good, I desisted from wearing glasses and indeed my vision got better over the next four or five years. However, in later life I developed "long sight" which caused me much trouble. My employer, the government, was quick to express its displeasure if an employee was late in completing his tasks. The Englishman is perpetually mounted on his horse and set out in a gallop. He turns furious when a native in his employment failed to exhibit a comparable state of readiness all the time. Fearing that I might lose my job, I took to medical advice. The optician recommended that I start using glasses but warned me against working after night fall. This turned out to be wonderful advice. We are forced to take to a life of arduous work; if it was left to him, no single boy on earth would take to regular studies. Delighted to act upon medical advice, I ceased reading and writing at dusk, spending my evenings comfortably reclining on a mattress with my eyes firmly shut. After a few days had passed in this manner, I noticed that my mind was inundated by stray thoughts which would rise and fall regularly: thoughts that were random, disorderly but extremely entertaining and joyous….

- In a few days I identified these as some kind of reverie. These days without English tutoring we cannot understand things for what they are, not even our own Vedas and Vedanta. Once I identified these random visitations in my life as reveries, it felt as though I was able to truly understand these for myself and make others understand too….
- One night, reclining on my mattress, thoughts about my childhood abruptly came flooding into me … alas, what a sad state this country has now fallen into! Children today look much older than they are; they represent a strange mix of juvenile instincts and mock seriousness. Can that be a healthy society where even children cannot spend their time in playful revelry? In my younger days, even the old and infirm could exhibit a child like joy and playfulness. On Navami[3] day, at the conclusion of routine festivities, Uncle Paran, then nearly 70 years old, would start rolling in the mud and slush, much to the excitement of the boys gathered around him … now that I am (64 years) old, such exhilarating thoughts come rushing to me and I transport myself to those times, unhappily left behind….
- People are now heard to complain that the world is bereft of all happiness … such morose thoughts they are constrained to express under the influence of a bad education, chasing wrong ideals and on account of their lack of faith in God. An English poet has said "Our sweetest songs are those that tell of the saddest thought".[4] This is indeed a new pose that Europe has now struck; such thoughts are now very dear to

the English-educated Bengalis and have entered their literary creations. I am unhappy with this line of thought. Even in my old age, having recollected and regained the boundless joy and happiness of my childhood, I can emphatically say that this world is full of happiness; that man's happiness is truly beyond measure. In order to sense God's infinite grace and mercy one has only to shut his eyes as I often do and meditate on the joyous frivolities of my childhood. Once in deep meditation, the working of divine love becomes easily manifest in us….

- Let me briefly dwell on my memories of Sandhi puja[5] … the hour when the Mother Goddess is worshiped as Chamunda[6] … that is but a miniscule passage in time; in popular belief, the time for which a mustard grain can settle on the tip of a buffalo's horn! It is in that fleeting moment that the Goddess appears, and it is then that all the propitious ritual performances must be performed … That moment represents the worship of neither the Goddess Durga nor Kali but of Chamunda – the fierce form in which the Goddess destroys the *asuras*.[7] This terrifying form of the Goddess we can no longer conceive. So long as we are not able to endure the "terrible" to sink all our thoughts and consciousness in the idea of this "terrible", the Mother will not appear before us in that form. We now habitually speak of power or *sakti* and of the worship of the Primeval Power (*Adyasakti*), but in effect, these are only empty gestures. Now clueless about an understanding of the meaning and substance behind this Primeval Power, we have turned soft and malleable, weak creatures which cannot stand to bear any pain and suffering, nor summon the hardiness to bear adversity. We can no longer be firm and resolute. It is thus that at the passing away of our parents, we seek to reduce the period of ritual mourning. This we seek to do by posing as upper caste Kshatriyas for whom the period of mourning is limited to 12 days. Clearly, we draw no pleasure in confronting the terrible as was once the case but meekly cow down in powerlessness and fright. We start agitating for doing away with animal sacrifices on the ground that bloodletting is revolting and cruel. But should bloodshed be cruel even when a part of divine worship, why kill animals in the interest of our own appetites? Those who had once bravely confronted the "terrible" were true Hindus, even when Bengalis by birth, true Aryans among men. Those who fearlessly engage with the "terrible" justly inherit the earth; they are truly men in every sense of the word. It is because Europe could cross the mighty Atlantic that it was able to lay its hands on the granary of America. And it is because it was able to overcome the challenges of long distance sea travel that England has gained the wealth of India. It is because the practitioner of Tantra is prepared to bravely meet the fearful and gruesome that he is rated as the most exalted among spiritual adepts. Such men are not like some soft jelly like substance but

hard and rigid as an iron staff in hand. Dhruva was a tantric *sadhaka* and this enabled him to secure from the Almighty a permanent abode in the sky.[8] The highly esoteric practices that Tantrics perform sitting on the human cadaver (*shavasadhana*) are most difficult and demanding. I take Prahlad[9] too to be a practitioner of Tantra. Who but a Tantric will not sink in water, be burned alive by leaping flames, one on whom poison can have no effect or be trampled underfoot by a mad elephant? The protégé of the Goddess Bhavani, Sivaji, was similarly a Tantric.

- We have turned much too soft and infirm. The slightest suffering makes us weak and despondent; the quality of fearlessness we simply call barbarity. We simply take a step back when confronted by some challenge. Our Durga Puja is not simply a festivity; it is poetry greater than *Aeneid*, *Paradise Lost*, *Inferno,* or *Jeursalem Delivered*. We are not the worthy descendants of those whose hearts produced such poetry. If we are to rise again as a nation, we have to turn active practitioners of Tantra, using powers gained thereby for the conquest of our senses. It is utterly wrong to suggest that the practice of Tantra encourages sensuality in men. On the contrary, such methods or practices are devised to conquer our sensual self….
- As I recall, at the conclusion of the autumnal Durga Puja celebrations, it was customary for children of all ages to put down in writing the holy name of the revered Goddess Durga … thereafter, the younger children would bow down to older siblings and pay respect to the women in the household who would lovingly bless them. They had the kindest thoughts for us and prayed that we all obtained what we coveted in life. Then there were neighboring houses that we also called on, and people residing in those houses would treat us to the choicest sweets and confectionaries. On our rounds of the village, we would visit the Bagdi[10] settlement, the area where Muslims lived, and the peasant quarters. At each of these places, we paid our respects, sought blessings, and fed ourselves sumptuously on the food offered. By the time we got back home amid much joyous dancing, it would be past midnight. Today no one has even an inkling of the merriment that we experienced. This is because such joy and merriment can no longer be reproduced, nor shared among people. Bejoya Dashami[11] has ceased to be celebrated in our homes. No one can now tell a moment of happiness from unhappiness…
- I recall with great nostalgia the verses in praise of the Ganges that my mother would recite as dusk gathered. In all my life, I have not heard verses more beautiful than those. These were verses on everyday life in Bengal composed by a true Bengali. In those simple, unpretentious verses we expressed our deepest aspirations. That was poetry that befittingly captured the spirit or essence of Bengal and could be justly called national poetry. Today such poetry would have been burdened

with grotesque words unfamiliar to most men and women. Reading older works like those of Krittibas[12] or Kashiram Das[13] or the verses on Ganges that I have just cited one is seized with the feeling that these truly reflect our collective life born of our most natural experiences. This is not a feeling that one would readily find in the works of Michael,[14] Hemchandra,[15], Rabindranath,[16] and Nabinchandra[17] even though they are all gifted poets. Quite naturally, in their poetry we will not find reflected the deepest thoughts of the common man and woman in Bengal; they do not represent our deep-seated desires and aspirations carried across centuries. It is for this reason that I say that such poetry is neither the national poetry of Bengal nor truly indigenous in spirit. Sadly, in their verses, there is not even the expression of the devotional sentiment found in Bengal. Bengal has ceased to produce pious devotees; there has been none since Ramprosad.[18] Even the Paramahamsa[19] appeared before us quite briefly, and not surprisingly, our literature no longer touches our hearts. An old episode comes to mind. At the time, Bankim[20] was Deputy Magistrate at Hoogly. One day, seated in his parlor he confessed:

> "I read Michael but did not like it, read Hem(Chandra) but did not like that either and then suddenly, the song of a boatman plying his boat down the river reached my ears…that song touched my heart and soul". It is therefore my suggestion that if we seriously wished to reinvigorate Bengali literature and give it a new life, we must take to producing a new genre of songs and poetry. Modern Bengal has still not been able to produce its national poetry; we continue to produce it in a culturally alien and unfamiliar form. The day I find our common vendor or shopkeeper take to contemporary poetry as eagerly as they had once taken to Krittibas and Kashiram Das will signal the birth of our truly national poetry. It is only when literature begins to appeal to the unlettered that it begins to generate the deepest feelings and strengthens the entire race….

- Bengali literature is still filled with the overshadowing presence of a foreign culture. How, then, are we to say that the Bengali has begun loving this nation and become its ardent devotee? … "Swadeshi" music[21] that one now hears is something unnatural; a passion imposed on us … it is therefore that I am prepared to say that Bengal is still unprepared for a Swadeshi movement.
- I married after I cleared the B.A. examination and hence my wife was not among those before whom I could recite modern poetry. Now she can read a little on her own; mostly she reads the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. She has told me that the more she reads these epics, the more she likes them. Other books, she believes, do not deserve a second

reading. It is thus that in the private chambers of my home where my wife rules, the (Bengali) novel has not come to roost! She is quite distraught at blank verse; I imagine that this is true of all women who have not been educated in our modern schools and colleges. My personal opinion in the matter is that by choosing to compose poetry in blank verse, Michael has produced much filth …. Had it not been for Michael, the *Vrittasamhar*[22] would have been counted as a fine specimen of national poetry … the person who could have produced comparable work was Gangacharan Sarkar,[23] the father of Akshay Chandra[24] … and such poetry could have also been produced by Akshay Chandra himself. No one understands Bengal and the Bengalis as thoroughly as he does. If only he had made an effort, we would have been treated to some fine poetry. However, my hopes of this ever happening are indeed faint. The man has virtually spent his entire life in simply drinking potfuls of water and belching! In poetic talent, there is really nothing beyond Rabindranath. Even so, I feel that he does not quite adore with all his mind and heart the natural beauty and everyday life in Bengal. I have little hope of his giving Bengali poetry a truly national and homemade character….

- Real servitude lies not in serving an employer. There is no indignity in it either. Once I was asked to carry out a dishonorable job. I strongly reacted to the suggestion and no one has ever asked me to carry out a similar job since. In the legal profession, one is enslaved to money and monetary matters; this is not true of even petty clerical employment. Being enslaved by money is the worst kind of enslavement that a man can suffer … it is therefore my feeling that a common job (*chakri*) can give us a life of freedom and contentment. And because it instills a certain self-discipline in man, humanity itself stands to benefit … my recommendation therefore is to accept any honorable and appropriate employment and to carry out the duties entrusted to you with integrity and the highest moral standards in mind. Should it be possible for you to meet your material needs through trade and commerce, by all means take it up as a vocation; if not, seek some employment….
- My life has had its measure of pain and discontentment; at times these have been induced by the loss of somebody dear. But at such times when I am melancholic or depressed, my wife silently enters my room, and upon seeing her, my pain fades away … From my childhood days I have been brought up to believe that the wife was the source of greatest strength for her husband. But though I have heard this being said very often, little did I realize the truth and significance that lay behind it. Now that I am beginning to understand this, I feel highly ingratiated. I feel ingratiated because we are all capable of using that truth to further own domestic peace and happiness. I have now come to realize that matters like

romance and marital love are of no consequence. These are but momentary. Unless made to rest upon true devotion, love is of no consequence. Love cannot turn pure and chaste in the absence of devotion and dedication and hence cannot lead to any social benefits. Radha's love for Krishna was based on selfless devotion as was Sita's for Ramachandra, Shakuntala's for Dushyanta,[25] and Miss Helen Taylor's[26] for the philosopher, Mill. Love, as it appears in contemporary Bengali literature, is not based on devotion but carnal feelings between the sexes. Once our poetry and novels are founded on selfless love and devotion alone, they will rank among the greatest literary creations the world has ever known.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Kalicharan Banerjee (1847–1907), a Bengali Brahmin converted to Christianity by the Church of Scotland. Was a member of the Indian National Congress.
2 Editor's Note: Literally, member of the Brahmo Samaj, a Hindu reformist body founded by Raja Rammohun Roy. The Brahmos eventually split into three factions over differences regarding social and political issues. Wearing glasses was popularized by the Brahmo Leader, Keshabchandra Sen; under his influence young men took to wearing glasses as a matter of fashion.
3 Editor's Note: Literally the ninth day of the new moon period coinciding with the autumnal Durga Puja worship. For ritual purposes, the worship of the goddess ends on Navami night.
4 Editor's Note: From Shelley's in "Ode to a Skylark".
5 Editor's Note: An important ritual that is part of the Durga Puja in Bengal. A brief moment in time that transits the eighth and the ninth day of the new moon period.
6 Editor's Note: A fearsome form of Goddess Durga. The name Chamunda comes from the joining of Chanda and Munda, two demons whom the Goddess killed in battle. Popular temples dedicated to the Goddess are found in both north and south India.
7 Editor's Note: Literally, the antonym of *sura* (God) and known to be in constant combat with divine beings in later Hindu mythology. In Vedic literature, they were counted among divine beings.
8 Editor's Note: In Hindu mythology by the grace of Lord Vishnu, Dhruva turned into the *Dhruva Tara* or the Pole Star. The tale occurs in the *Vishnu Purana* among other texts.
9 Editor's Note: The hero of one of the most popular legends in Hindu mythology, especially narrated in the *Vishnu Purana*. The tale was celebrated also in vernacular popular literature of the sants in north India.
10 Editor's Note: One of the ritually defiled castes in Bengal, mostly associated with menial work. Known for their physical prowess and commonly employed as bodyguards, doorkeepers, and watchmen by landlords and upper classes.
11 Editor's Note: An important event in the Hindu Bengali calendar marking the conclusion of the annual Durga Puja. However, the day has more social significance than the purely ritual and is celebrated by festivities and fraternizing.
12 Editor's Note: The author of the Bengali version of the *Ramayana,* Krittibas Ojha, was a poet from the fifteenth century.

13 Editor's Note: The author of the Bengali version of the *Mahabharata*. Was a contemporary of Krittibas.
14 Editor's Note: Michael Madhusudan Dutta (1824–1873). modern Bengal's foremost poet before Rabindranath. Experimented with the blank verse in poetry and composed several popular ballads and plays.
15 Editor's Note: Hemchandra Bandopadhyay (1838–1903). A Lawyer by profession, Hemchandra was a major poet in the Pre-Tagore period who excelled in writing patriotic poetry and the retelling of old Puranic themes in a modern context.
16 Editor's Note: Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) – poet, playwright, dramatist, artist, and song writer. India's first Nobel Laureate.
17 Editor's Note: Nabinchandra Sen (1847–1909). By profession a civil servant, Nabinchandra was a prolific poet, perhaps best known for his patriotic work *Palashir Yuddha* (The Battle of Plassey) where, untypically, he expressed with the deposed Nawab, SIraj Ud Daula. Also the author of a major autobiographical work.
18 Editor's Note: Ramprosad Sen (c. eighteenth century). Perhaps the best-known poet of Sakta devotional verses. Ramprosad was an active practitioner of Sakta Tantra, with the Goddess Kali as his favored deity.
19 Editor's Note: Ramakrishna Paramahamsa (1836–1886). Perhaps the most widely revered saint and mystic from the nineteenth century. The Ramakrishna Math and Mission, an institution with a global presence, are named after him.
20 Editor's Note: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894). One of the most brilliant minds of the nineteenth-century India, equally well read in Indian and European knowledge traditions. Bengal's first major novelist and the author of India's national song "Vandre Mataram".
21 Editor's Note: The reference here is to the political and cultural upsurge that followed the partition of Bengal in 1905. The movement produced an enormous mass of patriotic literature.
22 Editor's Note: The poetic work authored by Hemchandra Bandopadhyay narrating the slaying of the demon, Vritta in Hindu mythology.
23 Editor's Note: Gangacharan Sarkar (1823–1888) was a well-known poet and essayist who contributed to modern Bengali literature.
24 Editor's Note: Akshay Chandra Sarkar (1846–1913) was a prominent literary critic, poet, essayist, and journalist in the nineteenth-century Bengal, representing the more conservative Hindu cultural movement at the time. Was the editor of the well-known Bengali journal, *Sadharani*.
25 Editor's Note: Dushyanta and Shakuntala are the principal characters from the play *Abhigyansakuntala* by the classical Sanskrit poet and dramatist, Kalidas. Chandranath Basu wrote a lengthy commentary on this work called the *Sakuntalatattva*. Excerpts from this work are given in translation in Part III of the present volume.
26 Editor's Note: Helen Taylor (1831–1907) was a well-known English feminist, actress, and writer, who, together with J.S Mill, contributed significantly to securing gender equality.

B

The Philosophical and Social Foundations of Hindutva

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2

WHAT IS HINDUTVA?

*That which Europe takes to be history cannot be found among us. It would not have been bad at all if indeed we had come to possess it. On the other hand, it is only fair to say that we have not been handicapped on account of this lack. In our case, mental dispositions best reflect history. Historical accounts that do not reflect the mental dispositions of a people cannot be truly called history. At best these are entertaining tales spun by bards and popular entertainers. In Europe, that which is commonly called histories are, in truth, such home spun tales. There is really no reason for us to be disheartened by the fact Sanskrit literature does not include such works. However, even though the Hindus have not come to possess works of this kind, they too require their histories. We require our histories just as much as any other people do since it is history that carries the right ideals and instructions for a people. Such ideals and institutions that motivate and energize men and women are the substance of history alone; indeed, these are synonymous with history. It is only after they are thoroughly acquainted with their own histories that people come to realize what other essentials they require in life.

At the very root of our ideals lie our mental dispositions. These, in turn, are manifest in our everyday habits, social rites, and creative literature. In other words, we possess in good measure that which reflects our mental nature. Perhaps the Hindus possess this in a purer state and in excess of what other people are known to possess. The harmony that Hindu literature reveals in relation to Hindu rites and customs is not to be found elsewhere. All the same, it

* Excerpted from the Preface to Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prarita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892.

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would be only fair to say that unlike what has occurred in other societies, our customs and our literature have not been employed to investigate our histories. It now looks impossible to discover the spirit of our ancestors in archeology. In archeology we may at best find a few scattered bone fragments, and our archeologists needlessly make such a lot of noise about these discoveries that only serve to draw our attention away from genuine history. Hence, setting aside archeological findings we ought to turn to a thorough investigation of our social manners, customs, usages, and our literature. In this work, I have attempted this very daunting task. It is because people like Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay[1] and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay[2] have already blazed a trail in this direction that I have summoned some courage to undertake such work. Bhudeb Babu's *Samajik Prabandha*[3] and Bankim's *Dharmatattva*[4] already carry a discussion on the essence of Hindutva, and my attempt is a modest one compared to theirs. My shortcomings stem from the lack of both knowledge and opportunity. There is much to be said on the subject, and it is the duty of every Hindu to be engaged with this question….

A few prefatory words need to be said about the defining qualities of Hindutva that I have elaborated in this work. First, I cannot say with any conviction that I have been able to correctly determine these qualities. Hindutva is a concept that is quite difficult to understand. And yet, it is my belief that notwithstanding any errors on our part, the failure to correctly determine these qualities will keep us from knowing the authentic history of the Hindus. Second, it would be no exaggeration to identify the Hindu with an extraordinary originality even on the basis of qualities only provisionally determined. In substance, this originality or uniqueness follows from the fact that whether in the field of Hindu religion, ethics, philosophy, sciences, or social organization, the Hindu is not indebted to anybody. What the Hindu can call his own today is entirely his doing…there is not one bit that is borrowed from to someone else. Neither was such borrowing necessary. The claim that is sometimes made about Hinduism being influenced by either Islam or Christianity is entirely baseless. If the ideas that I have delineated in this work be examined closely, the reader will find that other than that of the Hindu, there is no other mind that is so inclusive, luminous, and cosmopolitan. All that exits on this earth, whether it be big or small, living or non-living, male or female, the past, present, or future, the dynamic primeval nature *(Prakriti*) or the immutable Absolute (*Purusha*) are all mentally accepted and accounted for by the Hindu. Just as in this world, the One is integrated with the many, and the many with the One, so is the case with the Hindu mind. The Hindu mind is all encompassing, large, and expansive as the world itself. Could there possibly be a mind more expansive than this?

To win back this mind for ourselves, we will be called upon to make serious and sustained attempts. Sadly, though the rightful claimants to this mind, we are now quite incapable of restoring this to ourselves. By vainly

boasting about our past glories, we shall never truly serve our cause; on the contrary, we might only further diminish our reputation and strength. The true test of humanity lies not in making such empty boasts, but in truly reclaiming it. It is undeniably true that our ancient heritage is truly unparalleled in human history and hence the need to win it back is greater in our case than with other people. Without making serious efforts in this direction, we could never earn the moral right to speak boastfully of our civilization….

In our collective history, we have now arrived at a critical juncture; it is important that as true Hindus, we attach the greatest importance to this realization. Once armed with a sense of commitment, reflections on our glorious past can only increase in intensity enabling us to appreciate our past ideals enshrined in our history. It is through adopting this approach that I have attempted to recount our past. This approach is not based on any false vanity and empty boasts…without winning back for ourselves, the great mental world that was once ours, we will fail to be true Hindus, regardless of any efforts to replicate our old habits and customs. Today, there is no bigger challenge than to be truly Hindu and no nobler mission either.

There is one other point that needs to be added. The characteristic qualities of Hindutva that I have enumerated here are not to be found in classical Hindu literature. Hence, some cynics and skeptics might argue that Hindutva does not actually reflect the ideas or values I have delineated. Suffice to say that the intrinsic qualities of any object cannot be determined without adopting a comparative framework. The sweetness of sugar cannot be established without comparing it with some other food. Our Hindu ancestors did not define themselves in relation to other contemporary communities and not surprisingly, therefore, the qualities of Hindutva that I have attempted to explicate in this work do not appear in older Hindu literature. There is a comparable instance that we may think of; qualities now associated with the Greek mind are not found in early Greek literature. This too is because the ancient Greeks did not resort to self-description. All the same, this should not lead us to think that qualities commonly associated with the Greek mind are mere fiction. It is true that the sweetness of sugar may be determined only in relation to other items of food. On the other hand, from this it cannot be concluded that the distinctive quality of "sweetness" in sugar does not exist without our tasting it. An identical argument may be made when delineating the qualities of the Hindu and on Hindutva.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay (1827–94) was an eminent educator who served the Government of Bengal in the capacity of Inspector of Schools. Author of well known treatises concerning Hindu social organization and domesticity.

2 Editor's Note: Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–94) was one of the greatest minds of 19th century Bengal, deeply acquainted with the history and culture of both India and Europe. Bengal's first major novelist, essayist, and thinker.
3 Editor's Note: A major social treatise, perhaps the first of its kind, published in 1892, the same year as Basu's *Hindutva*. It was earlier serialized in the journal that Bhudeb edited called *Education Gazette*.
4 Editor's Note: A short but important treatise on the concept of Dharma published by Bankimchandra in 1888. Among other things the work reveals the profound intellectual impact that the contemporary west made on Bankim's mind. The work was earlier serialized in the journal *Nabajeeban* edited by Akshay Chandra Sarkar.

3

SOAHAM (I AM THOU)

[*]*Soaham* – I am Thou: this is a claim that none other than a Hindu has ever made. This claim establishes the Hindu as a Hindu; on this is founded the Hindutva of the Hindu and Hinduism too (Hindu dharma). Let us therefore attempt to understand it. Generally speaking, there are two views regarding the relationship between the *Brahman* and the universe, between the Creator and creation. One of these views states that the *Brahman* and the universe are made up of the same material (*upadan*) just as clay is for the clay pot … the other view is that the *Brahman* is completely different from the universe, the Creator from creation. The second view argues that prior to the act of creation, there existed no material from which the world could have been created and that the Creator used his limitless powers to somehow create this world. This implies that the material which went into the making of the world was very different from that which constituted the Creator. Of the two views, the first is associated with the Hindu religious community and the second with the Christian. It is not as though the first view is not to be found elsewhere, but it is in India that this view obtains the greatest strength and popularity. It is for this reason that this view is taken to best represent Hindu India.

Which of the two views is true and worthy of acceptance? The question may be answered in two different ways and yet both methods will uphold the superiority of the Hindu view. In the first place, if the Creator was different from the creation, this would impose a limit on Him. He can no longer be treated as the Infinite. When there are two independent objects in existence,

* Excerpted from "Soaham" in Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrits Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 1–17.

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neither of them can be regarded as Infinite. Christianity and some other religions claim that even though the Creator is different from creation, He pervades the world and hence cannot be taken to be limited in nature. But a pervasive presence in the world is not the same as being the world itself. From this it may be concluded that if God be taken to be merely present in the world, rather than be identical with it, there has to be an entity other than the Creator. Once that is admitted, the Creator begins to be subjected to limitations. Second, it is inconceivable that there did not pre-exist the material of which the world was created. It is difficult for man to imagine an object without any substance; this is beyond his mental powers. How did something which had no previous existence assume some cognizable form? People who go by the second view maintain that since the Creator's powers are limitless there is really no task that this Power cannot perform although this may be difficult for man to comprehend. It could be misleading to say that that which man cannot comprehend simply cannot take place. In principle, the omnipotence of the Creator cannot be disputed, and yet just because it is within His powers, He may not undertake to do anything he fancies. That he is capable of doing anything he wills is proof of His being infinite and eternal but from this it does not follow that just because he is possessed of such omnipotence, He would be called upon to perform every act. Hence, it would be reasonable to argue that just because the Creator has not created the world in a manner that eludes human understanding, this would constitute a limit on his limitless powers.

In essence, the issue at hand is whether we need to understand the world as an altogether newly created entity or crafted out of some pre-existing material. It is commonly argued that the created world is so inferior in relation to the Creator Himself that to assume a common substance in both amounts to disrespecting and trivializing the Creator. But it is equally questionable to allege that by some strange oversight or fanciful design, God created the inferior substance that went into the making of the world.

There is another way in which this issue can be effectively resolved. On closer scrutiny, one will find that there is no radical difference between the two views expressed above. It is practically the same thing to describe the world as the manifestation of God Himself as it is to say the world is His creation. We may better understand the relationship between the created world and the Creator through a commonplace example. Shakespeare or the quality of being Shakespeare is one thing while the character Hamlet created by Shakespeare is quite another. There can be no doubt that the character Hamlet is distinct from his creator Shakespeare. The qualities that went into the making of Hamlet's character are probably not the same as those that constituted Shakespeare's own character. However, in another sense, there is not much separating the two. Though Hamlet be separate from Shakespeare, there are certain qualities in him that may be found in Shakespeare alone.

That quality is the quality of being Shakespeare, Shakespeare in flesh and bone, the very existence that is manifest in him alone and none else. This is the quality that is present in all his acts and moods, the quality by virtue of which Shakespeare himself is defined … a character created by Milton does not create this quality and similarly a character created by Shakespeare does not represent the essence of any character from Milton. This is a truth which applies to all authors and this simply means that whatever a particular person creates carries an imprint of his own personality. To the extent, this holds true it may be reasonably asserted that a human author and his work are inseparable. This makes it possible for the created object to say to its creator, *Soaham*!….

Though the effect may vary from the cause, the effect will have been foretold in the cause one way or another. European philosophers who accept Christianity as their faith accept this position. Hence, the Creator is bound to be present in the creation; the two can never be entirely separated. The Creator has thus to be acknowledged as part of the created material; hence, even in the dualist philosophy of Christianity, the universe is not fully distinct from God, nor the Creator from the created. In this view too, there is but only one existence … this enables us to grant the fact that every created substance can claim to be the Creator. From this it follows that in both views, viz. that which regards the world as an emanation of God and that which views it as a created object ultimately uphold the unity of creation and the Creator.

At this point, we are forced to resolve another pressing problem. Those of us who are dualists, as for instance Christians, could argue that since in the universe we witness both the good and the bad how could the universe be identical with *Brahman* or God? How could we fail to distinguish between sweet and bitter, foul smell and the pleasant, the beautiful and the loathsome, compassion and heartlessness? The first answer to this is that once an identity between the created world and the Creator is conceded, it is pointless to raise such objections regardless of the view we prefer to uphold. The second and the more important reason is that such qualitative differences between the two are, in truth, far from substantive. They emerge as differences only on one particular level of human experience. After all, tastes like bitter or sweet are only relative to one another….

European scientists have now established that things like heat, light, and electricity which appear to be different to our sense perception are, in fact, all a part of the same force/power in a finer sense. That which in everyday experience appears different is only false experiences created by our crude senses. He who is able to transcend these crudities and is able to see them in their finer forms will not so categorically distinguish the good from the bad. For him the apparent qualitative differences are not real. On the other hand, he who deludes himself to remain under the control of the senses, continues

to be influenced by these synthetic differences, and leads a miserable life. Are we right in distinguishing the sentient object from the insentient? Modern European science says that it is the material world that manifests itself as the fully conscious. We clearly perceive how all the material substances we consume each day contribute to developing our mental powers as much as our bodily frame made up of bone, blood, and other physical matter. The child born of blood and semen is not simply matter but also endowed with consciousness. An author fit to be our guru has aptly observed that the material world is actually conscious.[1] Hence, how are we to say that insentient matter and sentient consciousness are two entirely different things?....

However, even when denying any real differences between worldly objects, it must be admitted that even the world undergoes a stage when it experiences crudeness in every respect. While generally speaking there may not be real differences within worldly experiences, there remain some forms of difference. That perception of difference is a sign of crudeness ... but if that were so, how are we to say that the Creator and creation are made up of the same substance? If these are taken to be crude but also no different from God Himself, this amounts to subjecting God Himself to the polarized categories of virtue and vice. We may answer this objection by claiming that the crudeness of the created world is not a perennial quality, only a temporary one. That state of existence itself is not eternal; the world appears to be crude temporarily and as a temporary experience...

Hence the deluding *Maya* which emanates from the *Brahman* for a fleeting passage of time cannot really affect *Brahman* in any way. *Brahman* is eternal and immutable by nature and cannot be transformed in any way by that which is not eternal. *Maya* is subordinated to *Brahman* and not *Brahman* to *Maya*. This is because *Maya* itself is the creation of *Brahman*: just as magic is born of the magician and is fully conditioned by his will, so is *Maya* incapable of altering the form or existence of *Brahman*. However, just why *Brahman* assumes a delusional quality is best known to It alone. But since this is an alienation that It creates Itself and for Itself alone we are in no position to question Its act. No blame would fall if the created world taken to be synonymous with *Brahman* can be conjoined to the view that the created world and the Creator are, in substance one, notwithstanding crudities that are temporarily visible in creation.

Here, I shall try to meet some objections raised by those of us who prefer to study European metaphysical discourses rather than our own. Some among them allege that if the created world be treated as synonymous with *Brahman,* this amounts to admitting that every substance in the world to be equally divine. Under the circumstances, you and I both enjoy the status of the *Brahman*; the tree and the piece of rock that lies before us is equally so as is the brick mortar. This may well be interpreted to mean that there is not one God but as many gods as there are worldly objects. But nothing can

be more ludicrous than this; those who so argue know neither the nature of *Brahman* nor the idea behind the expression "Soaham". Little do they realize that *Brahman* is an object indivisible in nature, which can be perceived not through our ordinary sense perceptions but through inner spiritual knowledge. Thus, those who speak of multiple gods unwittingly reduce a transcendental figure to the status of a worldly object … this, in turn, suggests that in order to determine the true relationship between the created world and the Creator, one needs to perceive the world through spiritual vision….

Second, even if we were to view the world using our normal sight and not the spiritual, we could not possibly find the number of worldly objects matching up to the number of gods. The real meaning of *Soaham* is that *Brahman* and I are made up of the same material and not that I was *Brahman*. That which makes up a drop of water is the same substance that makes the ocean but should that lead us to believe that a single drop of water is the ocean?

Those who disagree with our view argue that *Brahman* is a grand entity, and since in this work none other than human beings are capable of noble work, how are we to assume that the Creator and the various substances that make up creation to be on the same footing? Was there no stage in the life of the world when there were no human beings? And did not that world once devoid of human beings give birth to humans? If that be so, are we really in a position to argue that none other than man is capable of performing good work?….

The Europe that you adore has now concluded on the basis of scientific experiments that every organization of this world, whether it be big or small, sentient or insentient, serves God's intentions behind running this world. It is because you are not cognizant of the powers of the soul, not fully invested in the knowledge of the *Brahman* (*Brahmajnani*), that you are led to think that what you perform yourself constitutes all that needs to be done in this universe or even that your objectives in life are identical with this world itself or of the Infinite *Brahman*. This comes in the way of your realizing that when compared to the world, you are smaller than a single grain of sand, that you are equally a part of the earthly phenomenon which, aiming to fulfill a common cosmic purpose, is simply rushing to realize the Infinite….

Some of us fear that if man were to identify himself with *Brahman,* this will create in himself a boundless ego. On the contrary, we are of the opinion that by equating himself with *Brahman* will man's ego be permanently sunk? The Hindu who declared *Soaham* also comes to believe that he was not the sole entity on earth; that all that exists was a part of *Brahman* as much as he himself was. And if all be *Brahman*, where is the scope for vanity and boastfulness?….

There was a time when Europe was subject to great persecution and violence in the name of religion. Many great men and women belonging to the Protestant Church preferred to voluntarily give up their lives rather

than undergo a change of faith. But in that persecution there also emerged a view which never surfaced in Indian literature. In Europe when great souls refused to undergo a change of faith, they did so in the name of individual freedom, and behind that sense of freedom, we may find the power and presence of the human ego. In Hindu literature, the legend of Prahlad[2] and other comparable legends reveal greater courage and nobility of character without carrying the slightest traces of ego. In the legend of Prahlad, it is King Hiranyakashipu who is an arch rival of Lord Vishnu and comes through as the very embodiment of vanity, tyranny, and self-righteousness. Despite the great ordeals that he was made to go through by his renegade father, Prahlad held on firmly to his faith in Vaishnavism, not for his own sake but that of Lord Vishnu. The Lord he took to be all, who was Prahlad?… it is thus that Hindu legends and history speak of nobility and courage, there is no trace of the ego and the self. In European history and literature, the opposite is the case….

That man is ultimately *Brahman* is the highest ideal that none but the Hindu could ever conceive; in truth, none but he had the courage and largeness of heart to accept this….

I pray that none of us brag and show unreasonable conceit in this matter. No one is entitled to truly understand or practice *Soaham* unless he leaves behind all traces of ego or vanity. In essence, this points to the true knowledge of *Brahman*, a free and open mind, boundless courage, and the power to reconcile all apparently contradictory forces, to truly acknowledge the greatness in all and their underlying unity. In a word, this is universality of the highest order.

Notes

1 Author's Note: Bhudeb Mukhopadhya in the preface to his *Paribarik Prabandha*.
2 Editor's Note: One of the most popular tries to occur in Puranic mythology, most fully narrated in the *Vishnu Purana*. Prahlad, son of the *asura* king, Hiranyakashipu, defied his father's orders to give up his faith in Lord Vishnu. Having failed to persuade his son, the king tried to put an end to his life through various means but was rescued every time by the grace of Vishnu.

4

LOY (DISSOLUTION OF THE SOUL)

**Soaham*: man is no other than *Brahman*. Why then is man called a man? This is because as a living form *(jiva*) man takes himself and the universe (*Brahmanda*) to be different from *Brahman*. So long as he thinks in this way, he continues to be a man. When this experience ceases, he turns free or liberated. He is then transformed into *Brahman*. Such an experience can be recounted only by he who has undergone the experience. He who has just about entered this path has but a small measure of this experience: I doubt if he can explain it all….

Our ignorance leads us to believe that in every instance our efforts must be directed at accumulating wealth; for the larger and most significant transformation in human existence itself we seldom spare a thought. Outside of Hinduism there is no knowledge of this transformation, neither of the sustained spiritual praxis that men need to follow in pursuing this path. Other than Hinduism, no religion speaks of attaining the exalted status of *Brahman*. In the Hindu view, for the *jiva* or the worldly creature, life begins and ends in acknowledging this unity with Brahman.

We must now pause to consider just how much of the Hindu's mental nature is reflected in this act of dissolution. Broadly speaking, this process denotes first, the destruction of the compelling urge for material enjoyment and conquering gross bodily temptations. The difference between the gross life form (*jiva)* and *Brahman* is no doubt great as is the time taken to overcome this difference. Self-disciplining and sustained spiritual praxis is necessary to successfully proceed on this path….

* Excerpted from "Loy" in Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 18–58.

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The spiritual journey that man has to undertake has to be determined by him alone and all the hardships that come on the way also endured by him alone. In this matter, he can expect no relief. I am but a lowly creature, humbler than the smallest organism, and yet I have to proceed on this path, notwithstanding the greatest hardships and recurring challenges.[1]

From this it emerges that he who abides by this belief is endowed with adequate mental powers, boundless courage, and powers of tolerance. But for such qualities found in abundance, none would be prepared to meet the challenges that lie ahead on the spiritual path … nowhere else on the continents of Asia, Europe, or the Americas has man been able to think along these lines. Compared to such a man, we are but virtually dwarfs….

As civilization progresses on these continents, there is a growing anxiety for securing objects of material fulfillment. This leads them to belittle the wisdom of the sages of India, shiver with fright at the prospects of observing difficult vows that require people to go without food and water and simply abuse Indian womanhood as victims of barbaric cruelty. It is not as though people elsewhere cannot withstand hardships; they can easily do so but only for the sake of material rewards. For obtaining worldly success, such men will willingly undergo sleeplessness, hunger, and the vagaries of nature. On the other hand, putting up with a degree of voluntary suffering with an eye on acquiring religious merit, they treat as cruel and barbaric conduct. There can be no comparison between them and Hindus. The Hindu's mental strength is great as is his courage and this enables him to walk the difficult path of spiritual praxis, without any power coming to his aid … in order to meet high objectives one does need to adopt such firmness and self-inflicted cruelty. If he were thinking of the world and worldly life alone, there would have been no need to be so exacting with oneself; it is because his thoughts are focused on the life beyond that he adopts these qualities. It is because he aims at assuming the status of Brahman that he is so relentless in setting such hard tasks for himself….

It appears as though we are fast losing this strength and resoluteness as a result of our coming into contact with Europe; our spiritual bones are turning soft and brittle. Hence it is imperative that we try in the fullest measure our efforts to save our natural and national characteristics as a people….

For the Hindu there is nothing unreal or untruthful regarding the belief in the human soul ultimately dissolving into the Over Soul *(loytattva*). This belief is based on deep reflection and intense meditative practices performed by our extraordinarily gifted sages and thinkers of early India … these men had unflinching faith in the concept of the *Brahman* which they had developed through sustained faith and devotion. These men also possessed an extraordinary vision which drove them to conclude that the attainment of Brahmanhood or to merge with the *Brahman* was the highest objective before man. One is bound to find such beliefs wherever there is an unshakable faith

in God. Jesus had sermonized "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mathew 5.48). In this sermon man has been advised to assume the nature of God. But to assume the nature of God is practically the same as merging with Him. Hence, this belief is not unique to Hindus but can be found among Christians too …whenever religion is oriented toward theism, the principal aim of human life will be God or something associated with God….

However, although both Hinduism and Christianity speak of the human soul merging with the divine, the results accruing from following this path are not identical. This is so because the Hindu and Christian theisms vary in their understanding of God's nature. The God of the Hindus is without any human properties (*nirguna*); that of the Christians is endowed with such properties *(saguna*). In the Christian view, God has not only the virtues of man but a few vices too. The Christian's God is not simply loving, affectionate, and merciful; he can also be easily moved to anger. This difference in understanding has produced palpable differences in meaning attached to the concept of "dissolution". The Hindu's path, compared to that of the Christian, is infinitely more difficult and time consuming. This also places it on a higher scale.

In the case of the Hindus, the transition to the state of the divine implies not only something conceptually larger but an equally difficult transition from the state of manifesting several common properties to that which manifests none. This requires conquering or casting aside of all greed, temptation, and base desires which form a part of worldly life. Prima facie, this amounts to doing away with society, declining to read poetry, enjoying the beauty of nature, or turning to social service. All that is required is to retreat to some secluded spot, far from everyday social life and contemplate day and night on God with the eyes firmly shut. This is how Europeans choose to describe our understanding of the matter and now some people in India, in imitation of our foreign critics, have started making the same allegations. Such objections, I have to say, are trivial and without any substance. It would appear as though our critics think that the transition from *saguna* to *nirguna* is not more than moving from one room to another. For them it is something that requires no special skills or training and can be performed at will….

The truth of the matter is that unless his animal instincts are brought under control through the use of education and social disciplining, a man can never advance on the path of acquiring a God-like character. Indian thinkers and sages who authored our scriptures realized this more than their counterparts elsewhere, and having realized this, they proceeded to formulate rules regarding our social and domestic life. They have ensured that people are forced to conform to social institutions through which we regulate and keep under control our natural urges and instincts. They also took care to ensure that no one took to renunciation or detachment from life

before our common worldly needs are fulfilled. Even today we hear of a yogi turning back a boy or a young man seeking spiritual initiation, advising him instead to return to domestic life. The reason that leads them to render such advice is the conviction that a life of renunciation cannot precede domestic life. This is why Hindus place such great emphasis on undergoing the experiences of a domestic life before they take to a spiritual path….

As I have earlier argued, attaining the state of *Brahman* means acquiring the great expansiveness associated with *Brahman* and after having overcome all the limitations associated with worldly life, ruled as it is by deluding *Maya*. This transformation may be compared to an expansion of the self (*atmasamprasaran*)….

Those who take this to be the destruction of the self are obviously in error. In order to so expand and extend our selves, it is necessary that we train ourselves in selflessness and altruism. Only such self-disciplining will help end our narrow self-centered desires. Now it has to be admitted that regardless of how well we succeed in expanding our vision and develop a sense of selflessness, this still does not match the expanse of *Brahman* Itself. To obtain a comparable largeness, we need to train ourselves further in the knowledge of the *Brahman* wherein also lies the largeness of the concept. And yet, cultivating a growing concern for the other is an indispensable part of our attempt to realize our objectives….

Entering a spiritual life requires self-disciplining through the institutions of the family and the community. Our scripture also provides for renouncing the world, perhaps more so than any other scripture in the world. However, unless we are able to develop self-control and overcome our narrow selfish instincts through rendering social service, it is not possible to step outside the bounds of home and society. And even when forsaking everyday social life, we are not permitted to turn our thoughts away from this entirely. Some people are of the opinion that all that a yogi is required to do is God-remembrance and that his thoughts need not turn to questions of community welfare. There can be no greater error than this. Our Puranas reveal how yogis and sages who ordinarily resided in forests, always worked toward the public good, and constantly thought of bettering the human condition. Whenever people are in some trouble or in fear of some adversity befalling them, these sages and ascetics helped them overcome their problems and free them of their anxieties and fears….

Since it is not possible for us to enter spiritual life without going through certain experiences gathered in everyday life, there is every need to strengthen our contacts with society … that which sustains and strengthens our social life cannot be discarded: ignoring such essentials in life begets sin. In early India, there was no food scarcity, and hence, there was no need for extra human labor. At the time, desisting from hard labor did not amount to a social failing; nor did this beget any sins. Today we are facing food shortages

and this calls for greater human effort and enterprise. Under present circumstances, failing to produce enough food for ourselves will turn us into willing sinners. It is not as though in the day gone by such labor and enterprise were not required or out of place. Today, ruled as we are by a different political and economic system, this has become a matter of great necessity … the crisis visible today had never arisen earlier; now is the time when our sincere efforts at alleviating our condition are the need of the hour and will bear the greatest fruits. We trust that God's intentions for us are good….

There is one other matter. Just as the act of uniting with *Brahman* is a matter of sustained and dedicated spiritual apprenticeship (*sadhana*), so is knowledge of *Brahman* itself. That which reminds us of the *Brahman*, whether this be in the form of some vision or experience, is a matter of cultivating knowledge of the *Brahman*. Hence, the discipline of science that explains to us the marvels of this universe, that which reveals His inimitable creative skills and the inscrutable divine play (*lila*) that goes on all the time are things that we are required to assiduously cultivate. In treading the spiritual path, we will be required to live the life of a celibate, remove ourselves as far as possible from commonplace and recurring temptations. But these acts do not also require us to forsake or abandon the beauty, tenderness, attractions, and pure pleasure that are all a part of this world. The depth or fullness with which the seeker of *Brahman* will be able to experience in this world cannot be matched by any other….

II

After this essay was published, Rabindranath Tagore raised a few objections against it in the monthly journal *Sadhana*. One of these objections states that *loy* or "dissolution" means not the expansion of the self but simply annihilation or dissolution. In his view, this erroneous definition on my part has led me to over emphasize the preparatory self-disciplining experience through our social and domestic institutions. Another objection states that there is really no relationship between the *saguna* and *nirguna* conceptions of God and hence the transition from one to the other is not possible either. From this it follows that developing altruistic feelings when in our social or domestic life cannot lead us to the state of *nirguna Brahman*. The very idea of transiting from the *saguna* state to that of the *nirguna* is, according to Rabindra Babu, a concoction. A third objection is that the theory of dissolution treats the world as false and hence is unfit to be the ground of some divine play. It is feared that once this view is accepted as an ideal, the world will simply turn into a barren desert. Given the nature of objections raised, it is only fair that I further clarify my own thoughts on the subject.

I have earlier reproduced a prayer from Prahlad[2] which reveals his eagerness to unite with *Brahman*. Prahlad says:

> Oh Lord! You have pervaded the entire world that includes me and all other forms of life. In so doing, you have only demonstrated your omnipresence, omnipotence and your good intentions for this world….

In case there remains some difficulty in understanding this concept, allow me to quote a further verse. *Brahman* says:

> I am the imperishable, inexhaustible *Brahman*. I was present before the act of creation and will continue to exist even after the Great Dissolution *(pralaya*). I am the Great Soul (*Param Purusha*).[3]

This implies that for Prahlad, being in the state of *Brahman* or else merged with *Brahman* amounts to the same thing … the verse from the *Vishnu Purana* that I have quoted makes amply clear that when merged with the *Brahman*, man acquires the conceptual largeness of *Brahman*, having given up the limited qualities of an ordinary, finite being. The question to ask here is whether there is any semantic difference between extension of the self and self-expansion. To me there appears to be no difference at all. And if there be no real difference between the two, would I be in gross error in using the expression "self-expansion" in lieu of an all pervading self? This is also the reason why I take absorption into the *Brahman* not as annihilation of the self but as its expansion.

I have also argued that if the human soul is to expand itself to the state of *Brahman*, it must journey through everyday worldly experiences. This follows from the fact that any form of constriction (*sankirnata*) and expansiveness are mutually opposed to each other. Surely, in order to expand, one has to overcome narrowness or pettiness in all forms. The journey from the human state to that of the *Brahman* is not simply one of transiting from a state of passion to a dispassionate state; it is equally a journey from a life clouded by worldly temptations to one which is completely free of these….

The purpose behind labeling *Brahman* as *nirguna* is really to affirm that it is beyond the three *gunas* or qualities of *sattva* (goodness), *rajas* (energized passion), and *tamas* (ignorance and inertia) which characterize a man in worldly life.[4] The concept of *nirguna* does not indicate a concept where no quality is attached to an object or person. It is not as though the *Brahman* is absolutely bereft of any attributes or property. If this were so, how could It exist? Our *shastras* have described It as *Sacchidananda*[5] and this does indicate a certain meaning and quality….

Altruism and other noble qualities of this kind are not associated with either *rajas* or *tamas*; they are represented by *sattva* alone. Hence, by developing altruistic instincts, when in society it is essential that we curb our baser instincts and develop the noblest….

Finally, there is the allegation that through perceiving the inscrutable divine *lila*, it is impossible to arrive at a conception of *nirguna Brahman* and that creative skills cannot be ever associated with a *nirguna Brahman* … it has been further alleged that for those who seek absorption in *Brahman* are oblivious of the fact that the world is truly false and illusory and not a divine field of play. But surely, those who call the world false and illusory call it so only in relation to the *Brahman*. If that were not the case, why would our sages and thinkers, dreading the falsehood of the world, consistently recommend that we aspire to reach a higher domain? However, he who attains true knowledge through sustained spiritual praxis and finds no real difference between the polarized categories of the beautiful and the ugly can well perceive the world in its universal beauty in ways that none other can. And if the evolution of the *Brahman* into the world is not divine play I don't know what else is….

Notes

1 Author's Note: In the Hindu view, spiritual life is contingent on human effort alone and not on divine grace. Also, if spiritual goals adopted are pure and sincere, success is bound to follow. In other words, as on the worldly plane, these will also emerge in the spiritual world as a creative link between cause and effect.
2 Editor's Note: This appears on page 19 of Basu's *Hindutva*. Basu cites *Vishnu Purana* I.19.72 in Jagannath Tarkalankar's translation.
3 Editor's Note: From the *Vishnu Purana* I.19.96.
4 Editor's Note: These are categories taken from the philosophical school of Samkhya wherein dynamic *Prakriti* is endowed with these qualities, not so the *Purusha* who is taken to be *trigunateeta* (beyond these phenomenological qualities).
5 Editor's Note: A compound of three qualities: *Sat* (truth), *Chit (*consciousness), and *Ananda* (Divine Bliss).

5

KAA PANTHA? (WHICH IS THE CORRECT PATH TO ADOPT?)

*Many thousands of years ago, this question had arisen in the Indian mind. Wandering about for long hours in the forest, the Pandava brothers were affected by acute thirst. Fortunate they caught sight of a lake in the forest which was guarded by a *Yaksha*.[1] On the command of the oldest Pandava brother, Yudhistira, Nakul, Sahadev, Arjun, and Bhima approached the lake to quench their thirst. At the lake they were confronted by the guardian Yaksha who told them that they could drink water from the lake only if they were able to correctly answer the questions that he would put to them. Mighty warriors as they were and confident of their powers, the brothers paid no heed to the *Yaksha's* advice and proceeded to drink water from the lake. No sooner had they sipped the water they all fell dead. When a worried Yudhistira went in search of his brothers, he similarly crossed the path of the *Yaksha* who warned him too not to drink water unless he had successfully answered his questions. Having caught sight of his lifeless brothers, Yudhistira sensed the gravity of the situation and agreed to answer the questions. The *Yaksha* then put several intricate questions to him, all related to dharma. Yudhistira was able to answer all the questions satisfactorily. Pleased at this the *Yaksha* told Yudhistira that he could have any one of his dead brothers brought back to life. Instead of choosing to revive his own brothers, Bhima or Arjuna, Yudhistira prayed that his half brother, Nakul, be brought back to life. Explaining his choice he said

> If we were to violate dharma, dharma, in turn, will destroy us … Kunti and Madri are both my mothers and it is my ardent wish that both remain

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: Kaa Pantha? Revised and enlarged edition of paper presented at Savitri Library, Calcutta in 1891. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1891.

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> blessed by the presence of a living son. For me both are equally worthy of respect and hence, by reviving Nakul you will make both my mother Madri happy.

Greatly pleased at this explanation, the *Yaksha* brought back to life all the four dead Pandava brothers. Among the questions that Yudhistira was able to satisfactorily answer and thus save the descendants of King Bharata, the foremost was: "Which is the correct path to adopt?" (*Kaa Pantha*).

To this Yudhistira had said:

> On this question, human opinion will always keep differing. In the Vedas there is not one opinion but many and this makes resolution to any question quite difficult. And now the power of dharma too has weakened due to human ignorance. Under the circumstances, the path that the noble minded (*mahajan*) have followed in the past is the right path to follow.

A long time has passed since Yudhistira answered his questions but even after such a long lapse of time, the same question has arisen once again among us … the time has arrived to once again determine the question "Which is the correct path?": the one adopted by India or that by Europe? Resolving this question satisfactorily will once again enable us to reclaim our humanity….

The difference between the two paths is the following: in India, we hold worldly life to be fully subordinate to afterlife. Whether in India or in Europe, there is a greater concern for life after death … whether among Hindus, Muslims, or Christians, the scriptures maintain that whereas worldly life is constricted, life after death has no bounds. However, even though all scriptures concur on the importance of afterlife, they are not in agreement with regard to its nature, and such differences in turn can possibly create differences over choosing the correct path….

On the whole, in the case of the Hindu, two philosophical traditions have to be referred to in arriving at any conclusions regarding afterlife: the tradition of non-dualism (*advaita*) and dualism (*dvaita*). Non-dualists say that the task before man is to overcome his animal existence and ascend to the status of the *Brahman* … according to *advaita*, the greatest objective before human life is to conquer the worldly temptations and aspirations and progressively reduce the distance separating human existence (*jiva*) from the Divine (*Brahman*). That distance can justly be taken to be infinite and the time ordinarily taken to bridge the distance may also be infinite. Above all, that journey has to be undertaken by man entirely on his own….

Dualists argue that there is really no need to destroy human existence in order to transform oneself into *Brahman*. Neither is there a need for the human soul *(jivatma*) to merge itself with the Over Soul (*Paramatma*). The dualist says that man will perennially remain separated from God and never

be one with Him. There thus appears to be a sharp difference of opinion on this question between the dualist and non-dualist. At first sight, the challenge before the dualist appears to be lesser than that before the non-dualist … but in both cases, for spiritual practices to bear fruit, this must remain challenging over a long time …. The debate that arises within Hinduism concerning our other-worldly goals is not to be outside Hindu life (Hindutva). The Hindu tradition does not claim that in spiritual life one needs to turn indifferent toward our recurring needs in everyday material life … if death be inevitable, dying out of some distress in this life brings greater harm, insult, and infamy compared to dying in pursuit of an afterlife.

In Europe, life after death is subordinated to worldly life. What Christianity calls liberation can be obtained only when a man can turn completely free of sin. Christ sacrificed his own life so that he could render man pure and sinless. If a European truly believes in Christ, he is obliged to undergo a certain course recommended in spiritual life so that he can develop a full faith in Jesus Christ … but there is a radical difference between the Hindu's *Brahman* and the Christian's God. The Hindu's *Brahman* is devoid of any qualities, the Christian's God possesses several. The *Brahman* is Infinite, not so the Christian's God … in the Middle Ages, Christians in Europe paid greater attention to life after death than they do now. In European life, there is no end to avarice and greed. We are all witness to Europe's efforts to extend her frontiers; her anxiety to occupy more land and territory continues unabated. Then there is the greed for greater wealth, and this explains their obsession for trade and commerce. This commercial expansion has robbed many powerless and innocent people of their sleep, it has trampled underfoot people who were once mighty and prosperous; placed many free people under political and economic subjugation….

Visit any major European city and you shall find the entire world gathered there. There are never-ending rows of shops; a whole city has nothing else but shops … it is hard to estimate the investment that goes into advertising these shops and the goods they display. The shopkeepers advertise their goods and commodities in all the leading newspapers of the world … they have even managed to reach us with their hoarse cries, situated though we are at such a great distance from them … when out on the streets of Calcutta you are bound to notice on both sides of the street huge billboards of several European products, as for instance Brandt's essence of Beef, Fry's concentrated chocolate, Cornfields Perfection soap, etc.

Then there is the European's obsession with self-gratification; the insatiable desire to fulfill his ever-growing material wants … In Europe, the wheels of righteous conduct do not move; what you find instead are signs of gross materiality … the European's ambition is to fully gratify himself; that is his primary resolve in life. If a book is seen not to carry signs of political dissent or else vulgarity, the publisher finds even the state to be powerless; for the

average reader, the state ceases to exist. Europe, which does not scruple to conquer other nations, can lay claim to only superficial notions of selflessness and altruism, and not a deep-seated one. The conquest of other nations must be taken to be a sign not of its rising power or ascendancy but of progressive degeneration.

Our sages who authored scriptures ruled that even though there were easy avenues to wealth accumulation, this was not the path that the leaders of our society could justly adopt. With the aim of amassing wealth, European merchants indulge in very corrupt practices of bringing ruin to countless people. At modern mechanized factories, goods are produced at a low cost, evidently to promote consumerism which is only making the poor poorer. Imitation shawls produced by modern machines are now selling at 12 rupees a piece compared to hand-woven Kashmiri shawls which would cost no less than a thousand. In India commodities were never advertised previously; this is now a common occurrence ... even Indian boys now use soap. European enterprise has now managed to sell such fanciful objects of daily use that Indian men and women cannot resist calling for the toilet table at least ten times a day. Once inside the toilet they spend an eternity and are simply devastated to find the slightest blemish in articles of daily use … the European paper and pulp industry successfully sells a wide variety of writing paper and envelopes. It will be a rare boy to speak of adult men and women who will not be mesmerized by their lustrous color and texture. Hence, among such classes the habit of writing letters has increased manifold. When I open my box of cigars what do I find? The figure of a most enchanting woman! It is for these reasons that I have begun to understand the current rage over the use of distinctive expressions in modern-day correspondence. The European steamship has certainly reduced the journey time between continents, but the time so saved, rather than be spent on social work or spiritual reflections, is devoted to working in additional shifts at the office or the factory.

It is as though Europe has packed itself with not one but ten different worlds. It has turned into a global warehouse. The militarization and the growing rivalry between various European states are not a small cause for worry … there is bound to come the day when there will be such a huge conflagration that the people of European states would all perish in that catastrophe … It is commonly said that Europeans highly value their independence; unlike the Hindus they are not victims of some alien rule … the slightest attempts to restrict their freedom turns them into fiery rebels. But in our opinion they do not possess what may be justly regarded as freedom….

Europe was born just the other day; its history is no older than two brief moments in time. And yet it already appears as though its future is dismal and frightening. Due to the increase in human population, changes in habitations, and other causes, there has no doubt been an increase in human predicament and problems … the tendency to amass material wealth through

the rise of modern mechanized production and an obsession with worldliness alongside will inevitably give rise to unwholesome consequences. Driven by this compelling power of material desire, some have begun to wonder if man should turn his attention to the fulfillment of such wants or share some thought for the afterlife. That time and nature are presently against humanity and that life has become insufferable are thoughts that have come to us from the example of Europe. In other words, they arrive from countries where real human wants and those only synthetically generated have assumed a comparable value.

Whether they were a foreign ruler or Indian, the ruling power in India has never dealt with subjects as peaceful and loyal as the Hindus. No other people have attained a sense of freedom both in relation to themselves and to state power … the only effective way to meet our wants and reduce them to the bare necessities is to subordinate thoughts of earthly life to the life beyond; to overcome the lure of material life and turn the mind toward God.[2]

In Europe, people may not turn to the Bible even once a year, but even for the common man, it is imperative to read the daily newspaper. Deeply influenced by matters in Europe, many Hindus too are now depending more on the agency and power of the state. Not surprisingly, Indian newspapers too have begun to view political agitation as the defining characteristics of our people….

For certain inevitable reasons, it is now incumbent upon the Hindus to pay greater attention to material wants … (but) I doubt if like Europeans the Hindu could turn so obsessively to material concerns, entirely overlooking God, soul, and afterlife. However, it needs to be added that since the Hindu's material circumstances are changing for the worse, and new problems are arising out of this change, it is necessary that he take adequate steps to meet these new needs or requirements. Failing that, he will only suffer and commit acts contrary to dharma. He will be an offender before God and lose his standing before fellow men.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: A demigod or else a tutelary deity with frightening appearance and supernatural powers. *Yakshas* are usually associated with Kuber, the guardian of the netherworld. Female version*: yakshini*.

2 Author's Note: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you. Take therefore no thought of the morrow for the morrow shall take thought for things of itself" (Matthew VI. 31–34). Driven by want and hunger even the Hindu has now taken to looting and rioting. This is something which we should pause to seriously reflect upon. Perhaps the Hindu too is now a distorted figure of himself. This is frightening.

6

NISHKAM DHARMA

*In the Hindu religious tradition, selfless duty (*nishkam dharma*) has a special pride of place. Liberation cannot come to man without preparing for it. God himself is its embodiment. Hence, in order to be able to merge with the Divine, man will have to turn selfless or *nishkam*. Wherever there is the concept of the worldly being dissolving into the Divine, the concept of *nishkam* will also be eternally present….

Is it impossible to practice this dharma? This is quite possible, never impossible. The other name for *nishkam dharma* is *nishkam karma*. In other words, that action which is righteous and consistent with dharmic conduct and when performed selflessly is *nishkam karma*….

Is it possible that man perform some action without coveting any results to follow from that action? This is indeed possible, but its performance is far from easy … there are people though only a few in number, who are entirely given to the amassing of wealth. But accumulation of wealth or leading a life of plenty is not their objective. They do not necessarily spend this money in acquiring splendid mansions, horse-driven carriages, or fancy clothing. This may falsely lead you to think that their accumulation of wealth is *nishkam*, but once you pause to reflect on the question, you will realize that this desire to amass wealth is itself driven by a sense of intense desire and pleasure, a sense of addiction and self-gratification. Such men are also in the grip of a delusion which compels them to neglect their other duties in life….

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrta Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 59–70.

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This argument applies equally to our moral and religious life. If deeply moved by the sight of a starving man, you were to offer him food; this is certainly a selfless act. When the nobler feelings of the heart like kindness and compassion are on the rise, the processes of reasoning turn weak. Under the circumstances, the human mind does not quite possess the power of expressing their commonplace feelings or desires. Influenced by kindness and compassionate thought, many exercise heartfelt charity. Such acts of charity must be separated from charitable acts which aim at winning some public fame or distinctions for oneself. Acts of genuine and selfless charity are not as rare as one may be led to think … right education prepares man better to carry out such noble duties in life….

However, though born of feelings of compassion and moral responsibility, it is not always safe or reasonable to make them the basis of our selfless acts … many charitable and compassionate men, having offered substantial sums in charity, turn poor themselves and are, at times, forced to borrow to meet their daily needs. By so doing, they commit an act of injustice on themselves and on the members of their family. Should they be unable to pay back the money borrowed, even their creditors persecute them … it is therefore important to interrogate a more effective way of practicing altruism….

In truth, the nobler feelings of heart are many as are the number of people who justly deserve to be the objects of our beneficial deeds. Both these factors create certain operative difficulties. It is rarely that men are able to fully conceive all their noble feelings. Some of us are kind and affectionate but not moved by suffering in others; some others are compassionate but unforgiving. And if the number of people who stand to benefit from our charitable actions represent a good number, that is no mean achievement in itself. It is realistically impossible for us to feel for all or even practically extend help. These twin difficulties require that we try and integrate all our good feelings and realistically delimit the number of beneficiaries. The authors of Hindu law books have recommended that this task of integration and reconciliation be carried out through love and devotion to God. They have also found God Himself to represent the collective presence of all those who deserve to be benefited by our noble deeds. Such reconciliation is best carried out through the agency of God Himself … it is therefore that our scriptures recommend that when performing our acts and duties, we surrender the fruits thereof to God. In other words, our actions must be for the sake of God. What does this mean? It simply means that God is present in every being, and once we obtain God, we obtain humanity too. Once you love God, you begin to love the entire humanity. It is then that love and devotion begins to turn truly universal; but for these qualities, no religion can turn universal. Once we become truly devoted to God, we begin to fulfill his plans for the world by simply carrying out his command. Such an attitude or approach cannot be burdened by petty human desires. Hence, devotion to God makes it

easier for us to practice ;*nishkam dharma* we might even say that this, then, becomes the nature of faith….

Our scriptures, though praising *nishkam dharma*, have also provided for certain actions born of natural wants or desires (*sakam karma*). They provide ways of worshiping gods and goddesses. This only proves that though *nishkam dharma* is superior in worth, in everyday life there is also the need for acts born of our natural instincts and desires … the successful running of our everyday social life has several requirements such as learning, intelligence, accumulating wealth, gathering physical strength, training in weaponry, and several such matters. Indifference to such pressing and mandatory requirements is a violation of dharma (*adharma*)….

Hence, our everyday actions in the world, meant to serve our recurring worldly needs, equally represent righteous conduct and lifestyle *(dharma*). The rigorous disciplining of the mind that *nishkam dharma* calls for is not consistently found in most people. Not all can master self-disciplining either … it is for this reason that our scriptures have provided for routine social acts and functions in keeping with the differing human power and potential. Such an arrangement can never be faulted….

However, regardless of how you will succeed in performing your routine worldly functions, these can bring you only the material objects of desire, not God Himself. … obtaining God will require man to turn selfless since God Himself is selfless. But for practicing *nishkam dharma*, the Hindu can never realize his highest objective….

7

HINDU POLYTHEISM

Political Sagacity in Religion

*Hinduism equally sanctions the worship of Divinity as formless (*nirakar*) and endowed with form (*sakar*). The worship of the formless God is meant for the wise and the worship of a god endowed with form is for the unlettered and ignorant. People of other faiths such as Christianity and Islam are often heard to denounce image worship. Hence, it is important that we discuss this issue, however briefly….

Ordinarily, the natural world and the mental are so deeply intertwined that it is extremely difficult for a man to limit his thought to the mental world alone. When bound by mental processes alone, our thoughts can neither give us contentment nor attain a state of fullness….

In the domain of religious life, images of various divinities abound. There is, for instance, the creation of Phedius's Jupiter, Madonna of the Roman Catholics, and the numerous images of Hindu gods and goddesses more commonly known to us. None of these are trivial or deserve to be slighted; in their own ways, they are all equally true and meaningful and carry the secrets of mankind and of the natural world. The origin of divine images lies in human nature, in the natural world, and in Divine Nature. Here, I shall attempt to explain the necessity of image worship and the benefits accruing from this practice.

The act of image worship simply amounts to worshiping Divine Power in some insentient but tangible material form. The Power in the Divinity the image worshiper experiences through exercising his mental strength. That

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Tetrish Koti Devata. Dharme Adhikardarshita arthat Dharme Rajnaitikata" in *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 253–294.

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form of experience is idealization. Hence, what occurs behind the construction of an image is artistic idealization. Now we must pause to ask the following question: if an image be a form of idealization, is this necessary for advancing in spiritual life? Idealization imparts to us the lessons of the heart more effectively than any other means. The aesthetic joy that comes to us through reading poetry cannot arrive through the pursuit of dry moral discourses. Whether or not moral and philosophical discourses are intelligible to us depends on the powers of our minds; poetry, on the other hand, has to do with the heart. It is therefore that poetry ranks so high within the world of literature. Valmiki's *Ramayana*, Vedvyas's *Mahabharata*, Dante's *Inferno*, the plays of Shakespeare, the lyrics of Shelley, and the *padabali* verses of Vidyapati[1] are virtually jewels in the field of world literature. It is for a similar reason that the music of Orpheus, the sculpture Phedius, the paintings of Turner, Titian, and Rafael constitute the highest treasures in human possession and represent symbols of human progress through time. Hence, if idealization contributes to make poetry, paintings, and music so grand, eloquent, and instructive, why cannot this be true of images as well?….

Some of us argue that while all images may be constituted of some material, how is one to construct God Himself? God is pure consciousness, an object truly excellent and pure. An image on the contrary is made up of some material that lacks consciousness. It is of inferior existence and impure in quality. My first response to this is as follows: whether conceptualizing God on an entirely mental plane or through the use of some image or symbol, He must be given some cognizable form. The great yogis who gave primacy to the soul were able to conceive God in some form in yogic meditation. Second, I fail to understand just how the construction of an image amounts to disrespecting God and comes to represent a vile act. If the integral relationship between the mind and the body that I have earlier spoken of be true, then just how does the use of some material substance end up in disrespecting Him? You maintain that an insentient material substance is inferior and impure; on the other hand, your mind constantly desires some material objects and finds fulfillment in attaining these. To your mind the material at that stage seems neither inferior nor impure….

I do grant that God ought not to be worshiped as an image; it is the Divine Presence within it that needs to be worshiped. The best religious works of this world uphold this view. Even the Bible does not actually forbid image worship. It warns us not to fraternize with image worshipers since in the event of that happening "they will turn away thy sins from following thee, that they may serve other gods" (Deuteronomy 7:4). The God of Israel declaring himself as a jealous God (Exodus, 20–25) forbid man to worship images other than that of Himself, fearing that on finding a God cast in gold and silver, Israel might mistakenly take gold itself to be God. It was thus that He directed Israel to burn down those images. So long as one does

not take the material substance to be divine, there is no harm in worshiping such images. He who is weak and ignorant is embarrassed with an image itself, not the properties that it is said to represent. Image worship is not an improper or impious act….

The reader also ought to understand that in this country, the images of gods and goddesses are not created by highly skilled artists in keeping with classical rules of artistic production. The high skills of craft production and the kind of gifted artists that came together to produce the famous image of Jupiter at Athens are not to be found in India. Hence, image worship in India is not true image worship and ought to be discarded….

The image of Hindu gods and goddesses is not meant for saints and sages either; these were recommended by them for use by the common man. The Hindu tradition suggests that we construct such images to which the unlettered common man could easily relate….

Unlike the mental images of gods and goddesses created by the Greek poet, those appearing in our Puranas are not simply images. In the images created by the Greeks only gods reside; in those created by the authors of our Puranas, there is both the Creator and His entire creation. In the Greek image, there is only the externally visible figure or else the mood that it represents; there is really no earthly substance that is included. Their image adorns no clothes or ornaments; it represents nothing connected to the plant or animal kingdom. In short, it represents no worldly substance. In the Puranic images of the Divine are included apparel and ornaments, flowers, fruits, beasts and birds, the moon and the sun, planets and stars, and in fact the whole universe itself. Hence, if the universe be an image of God, the Hindu poet has created both an image of God and the Divine Presence. On closer scrutiny, you will find that but for the Hindu none else has been able to capture the Divine Presence in his artistic creation. None has succeeded as well as he has in revealing the Creator through His creation. Here, the whole world is the true embodiment of God….

None but the Hindu has succeeded in revealing how the universe is filled with Divine Presence. And hence, none but he has attempted to describe the world itself as God Himself. Neither the Christian nor the Muslim has sought to create graven images of God keeping in mind the limitations in common people. They have failed to create a God whom the common people would relate to or understand; they have not given people the God that they would readily identify with. Everywhere people who framed scriptures chose to rest contented once they envisioned God; they made no serious attempt to make Him visible to common people. They never paused to think of the needs of ordinary people; it never dawned on them that in the world there lived many other people beside themselves….

This only demonstrates that whereas the Hindu envisions the whole, the European restricts himself to a particular part. The Hindu is inclusive, the

European exclusive; the Hindu unites, the European divides. The Hindu represents the epic, the European only a small ballad … unlike the European, the Hindu is not insular; his concerns are not limited to the educated and advanced people of the community. Unlike the European, he does not consider himself to be sovereign and attempts to bring around others to his way of life and thought. He fully acknowledges the fact that we are all differentiated in terms of our mental powers and will remain so eternally.…

Behind the Hindu's image of gods and goddesses stands his expansive heart and the universal social spirit of the Hindu. The form that the Hindu gives to the image reflects his universalism and his willingness to relate to the whole world … that image you may always improve upon; and if necessary, even construct a new set of images, making them worthy of both the educated and uneducated alike, but under no circumstances should you shun the imagery. If the image breaks so will Hindu society at large. This is because the image will not break so long as our heart does not. Where there is no heart or feeling, there can be no images, and without images, there can be no society either. A society which is not made to rest on this feeling will remain fragile and will split open at the slightest stroke of an ax. Who would have known that such a civilized society as that of Athens would come crashing down in a span of merely 150 years? Who would have known that the unity of the Roman Empire would be so badly splintered beyond recognition in a matter of just ten days? On the other hand, which of us does not know that the gigantic and immutable Hindu society, ruled by the jati system, would eternally remain intact, unshaken, and unaffected by political turmoil and hundreds of revolutions?.…

Why do we need God? Is this merely for some unique experience or progress in spiritual life? Of what uses is worshiping a formless god for a person who cannot conceive a formless god? Is it not infinitely better to permit him to place before himself a tangible object of worship, an image, which can advance him in spiritual life? We seek not merely an improved method, nor expect everyone to adopt the highest methods and ideals in religious life. However, we certainly seek devotees of God and a deep attachment to spiritual life regarding the wish that, regardless of the method adopted, each of us will be filled by religious inspiration. He who cannot fulfill his spiritual life through worshiping the formless but feels inspired to do the same ought to be led to the worship of God endowed with form. If this is not done, both the author of our *shastras* and social leaders would be at fault. Hence, the pious, god-fearing Hindu consented to authorize the worship of images by the common man. This proves that the regulation of everyday religious life too needs sagacity and statesmanship.

Much agitation is now in the air regarding the propriety of image worship though it is hard to understand why the agitation arises at all. This is an unfortunate development. Those agitating against image worship allege that

creating an image of God amounts to reducing the Infinite to a finite form. One way of answering this allegation would be simply to ask "So what"? To render the Infinite to finiteness is not an act of disrespect. The Infinite is aware that we are finite beings, small and powerless, quite incapable of conceiving the Infinite. It can never feel slighted by our attempt to reduce into finite form. In our defense, it also needs to be said that in so acting, it was never our intention to belittle Him in any way....

For some years in our country too, there has been a false and utterly delusional campaign launched regarding the necessity of worshiping a formless God. It is precisely those who have launched this campaign that are particularly speaking ill of our image worship as though they themselves have risen above all limitations of thought or conception. Little do they realize that none but the Hindu yogi can experience what is truly Infinite and beyond form. Little do our critics realize that however large or expansive their experience may be, it is actually an experience neither of the Infinite nor of the formless. In truth, they too worship God endowed with form. They have neither the knowledge of how difficult it might be to contemplate upon the formless God, nor the kind of method that is required to arrive at such experiences....

At this point, it is only just that we add a further point to our larger argument. Christians and people of some other religions claim that though their God is Infinite and formless, they are still able to experience such a God in their lives. But this is a claim that is difficult to understand. They further claim that their God though formless is endowed with certain properties (*saguna*). But how can a *saguna* God be infinite and formless? Once certain properties are ascribed to an object, this also constitutes a limiting quality for that object. Hence, a merciful God will always be defined by the property of mercy. This applies equally to the notion of a just God. If a particular property represents a limitation so will a compound of several qualities. Hence, the *saguna* has also to be seen as *sakar*. That some people call this God infinite and formless is a delusion they unwittingly entertain.

Our critics claim that image worship can only lead to a moral decadence in individuals and collective decadence in a nation. Romesh Chunder Dutt[2] has written a history of India in which he has argued that until they took to image worship, the Hindu remained in an exalted state of civilization. How image worship caused this decadence or in exactly which fields the decadence was most visible are questions that he chooses not to answer. But even if we grant a general decline among Hindus, there is really no just cause to attribute this to image worship. On the contrary, history reaches us a different lesson. The ancient Greeks and Romans had attained a high level of material civilization and yet they were all image worshiper ... and to claim that the worship of images causes moral decline does not seem to make much sense either. If God be worshiped by investing divine powers in an image of

God, we fail to understand how this can impart immoral instructions … this is possible only when we attribute to our gods qualities associated with ungodliness: anger, aggression, debauchery, and the power to inflict evil. It is not unlikely that this is what some people actually do. The dacoit turns to the goddess Kali seeking power and protection before attempting to rob someone. Wicked men, wishing ill of others, try to appease various gods and goddesses. Traces of such practices are to be found in all societies, among people that permit image worship and who do not. Such practices reveal the pettiness of the human mind, not that of the gods, and such pettiness has no association with religion. Do make every attempt to wipe out ungodliness but do not resort to speak ill of images. What do we seek for ourselves when we pray before such images? Do we seek to usurp another man's property or pray that his life be doomed or cursed? Do we simply pray that God give us powers to perpetrate wrongs or grant us immortality? On the contrary, we always approach gods and goddesses with the noblest of feelings and aspirations, taking them all to be identical with the Infinite, Absolute *Brahman*. If that be so, how can image worship be the cause behind moral decline? Are we to simply repeat the criticism that the Europeans level against us? And do ask the European if the worship of the formless God which they always boast of has effectively reduced the incidence of misdeeds, sinfulness, and petty crimes among them? Is it not fair to say that such tendencies are only increasing in such societies that do not permit image worship?….

In sanctioning image worship, the authors of Hindu *shastras* have revealed a rare judiciousness that cannot be found elsewhere. To realistically grant natural differentiation within ways and methods of worship *(adhikar*[3]) is the kind of farsightedness and sagacity known only to the Hindus. It is the defining property of both the Hindu and of Hindutva. This arrangement ensures that we have the interests of everyone in mind: of the wise and ignorant, the scholar and the unlettered, of the socially highly placed and the common man. It ignores nobody, it excludes nobody….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Padabali verses are poetic compositions best identified with medieval Vaishnava poets of eastern India. Vidyapati c. fifteenth century CE was a polymath who composed in both Maithili and Sanskrit.
2 Editor's Note: Romesh Chunder Dutt (1848–1909) was a member of the ICS who held many responsible posts under the British government. Best known for his economic history of India under British rule in which revealed the economic regression that occurred during this period. Translated the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* as also the *Rig Veda Samhita*. His A *History of Civilisation in Ancient India* was published in 1890.
3 Editor's Note: Literally, entitlement. In traditional Hinduism, this term was the basis of the concept of *adhikarbhed* which effectively suggests a graduated scale of rights and privileges with reference to laying claims to certain forms of knowledge certain social and ritual practices.

8

THE VARNA SYSTEM AND THE FORMATION OF OUR NATIONAL CHARACTER

*Broadly speaking, it may be said that whereas English civilization looks outward, the Hindus look inward.

The English civilization is based on production of wealth and the Hindu, on acquiring religious merit (dharma). In other words, the accumulation of wealth constitutes the defining quality of the English civilization and success with amassing wealth also represents a qualitative improvement. In the case of the Hindus, it is advances in spiritual life that moves forward the quality of Hindu civilization. However, even though English civilization seeks material success and affluence, it cannot be said to be entirely bereft of spiritual life. The English are rich and affluent, but they also possess a body of religious literature, instructions in spiritual life, religious institutions, and preachers. Though obsessed with material life, they also possess a strong mental strength. It does not appear as though eminent and gifted men like Hobbes, Hume, Locke, Buckle, Mill, or Spencer have taken birth in greater numbers elsewhere as they have here. Consequently, those Englishmen possessed of a religious feeling and mental strength represent an excellent order of men. However, they mostly belong to the upper classes; on the other hand, there is hardly a more beastly variety of men than those found among the lower classes of England. While the upper classes in England are educated and possess exemplary character, the lower classes are rather immoral, and dishonest. Admittedly, the Hindu lower classes are not morally at fault to the same degree but this is only to be expected.

Leading a high moral and religious life requires the right opportunities and material sustenance both of which our lower classes lack. Even so,

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Barnabhed O Jatiya Charitra" in *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta Medical Library. 1892: 82–96.

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lower class Hindus possess a far superior moral and religious character when compared to lower class Europeans. It is equally true that in this matter of leading a moral life there is greater similarity between upper and lower class Hindus than there is between their counterparts in England. In these respects, upper class Englishmen and the lower reveal very different qualities. The class composition of English society is quite heterogeneous. Among Hindus, heterogeneity does not exceed that which is to be expected naturally .... There is greater cultural homogeneity between various classes within Hindu society. In England, the educated upper classes are knowledgeable about Christianity, the lower classes say that they have not heard the name of Christ! This has no parallel in Hindu society. The lowest and most illiterate among Hindus have heard of all Hindu deities, worship them, and observe a religious life that is within their means or capability. They listen to Puranic lore with attention, take care of his wife and children, respect the wise, acknowledge the wife as wife, feed beggars, and help their close relatives with gifts of food to the extent they can. What is the reason for the greater cultural homogeneity in Hindu society? How is it that among Hindus, the lower classes had a moral and religious life comparable to that visible among upper classes?

There could be many reasons for this but here my attempt will be to explain not the greater homogeneity in Hindu society but to examine whether this is related in some way to our *varna* system[1]....

In worldly life, man is related primarily to two things; one, the pursuit of material success – the common aims of securing health, wealth, and fame; and the other, a spiritual life which is characterized by religious thought and observances. There is nothing else to which human life is really related....

II is not as though the English and other people of the West always prize material life above spirituality. English literature praises a spiritual life more than material affluence. The English say it was more important to advance in spiritual life than in the worldly ... and yet, as a people, the English are generally given to worldly success and possess a character that is impious and dishonest. Why is there this distance between English religious institutions and everyday life? Could it be that the English people have not understood the value of their education or else failed to lead a life in keeping with the ideals that they have been taught? Perhaps the reason for this lies in the following: though the English teacher and religious leaders upheld the superiority of spiritual life, the everyday social life of the people is not established in religion itself ... in the practical unfolding of everyday life, the average Englishman comes to realize the vast field of work before him where it is difficult to cease work or not to think of adding to his material possessions. He finds worldly temptation overpowering and irresistible. It is for this reason that the common Englishman proves to be such a despicable and villainous character. That is also because they

simply do not hear the religious preacher speak ill of materialism. Even in his day-to-day life the Hindu realizes that the path of materialism is an extremely narrow one with little scope for movement outside its narrow and beaten paths. In this domain, the Hindu is compelled to remain within predetermined vocations which have been followed for thousands of years by his ancestors and will be followed by generations to come after him. In the Hindu understanding, the ideal path to be followed by man has been deliberately restricted and rigidly defined since, if left boundless, it can only render man into a self-seeking beast … this is because the Hindu honors the division of caste (*varna*) of vocations and vocations based on caste ranking.

It is because in India a calling or vocation is often linked to caste that Hindus have truly come to regard a material life as inferior to the spiritual … the *varna* system classified men into the "good" and the "bad". The "inferior" classes were expected to respect the "superior" and try to adopt their ways of life. This process quite visibly occurred within Hindu life. One of the savory consequences that followed from this arrangement is that the superior classes were never permanently detached from the inferior. The situation remains relational; in other words, the superior remain superior in relation to the inferior and the inferior remain inferior in relation to the superior….

There are some qualities related to the *varna* system that especially promotes spiritual feeling. However hard he tried, the common man cannot overcome avarice and greed. They equally aspire for fame, affluence, and power in society. But in instances when society appears to be a vast ocean, men are not so easily drawn to seeking power even when such desires do arise from time to time … English society is like a vast and bottomless ocean. In such a society, the common classes of people do not ordinarily obtain hopes of serving exalted positions and power for themselves. In India, Hindu society too is as wide as an ocean but not as bottomless as is English society. Hindu society is divided into many divisions each of which is fragmentary in relation to the entire society. Hence, the idea of growing or developing themselves within the bounds of their respective caste comes naturally to them … the common man fears only the rich and the powerful within the same caste of which he is a member and not some other caste that lies outside. That fear is not disabling and hence, allows ordinary people to rise to the position of respect and power through exercising their special skills honestly and assiduously. Lower class Hindus have equally contributed to the construction of temples, guest houses, charitable institutions, roads and rest houses, wells, and many other institutions that produce social good and bring religious merit to the concerned individuals. England and other countries of the West which do not have the institution of caste produce only a handful of great and magnanimous men. In India, the *varna* system ensures

that a good number of men are produced from each of the various classes; even the lowest castes are capable of producing excellent men.

It is commonplace that when people of a certain caste reach a superior status by virtue of their noble and philanthropic work, others attempt to emulate them. This emulation proceeds along the same reason that which inspired the lower classes to follow their superiors. That apart people from within a *varna* tend to follow a man who has risen to power out of a sheer sense of fear. In this way, a caste helps all the members follow the righteous path laid down for that particular caste….

Are we then to assume that the caste system is here to stay? I am not prepared to pass a judgment or to predict its outcome … it is beyond our power and capability to adjudicate on so grave a social question. Suffice to say that unsolicited advice or high sounding ideals by themselves will fail to bind our society. Good advice is for the noble and upper class people, but society does not comprise such people alone. Mostly it consists of ordinary people. Common men and women cannot be motivated by advice or spend their lives enriched by high ideals. To prevent the integrity of our society and to impart upon it good and righteous conduct will require high vision but also effective measures of social control through enforcing cultural rites and conventions. In the past, attempts have been made to set aside our traditional social conventions and replace them with higher social and religious ideals. The Buddha tried this once; Chaitanya repeated this a few centuries later. Both attempts, however, have failed miserably. Buddhism is now practically dead in this country and the common Vaishnava now represents the scandalous deeds of Chaitanya. The pure universal love of Chaitanya has now assumed the most disgraceful forms. It is thus I say that high ideals and inspiration alone cannot hold together our society nor direct it toward the desired goals. In order to preserve the integrity of our society, we also have to put in place the regulatory mechanisms of essential rites and observances.

Note

1 Editor's Note: Found in early Vedic literature, the word *varna* literally means color and may have been originally used to differentiate ethnically two distinct groups: the fair-skinned Aryan invaders and the dark, indigenous population. The division based on color eventually gave way to a far more complex and rigidly codified system of social organization which was rigidly structured. This was the work of the *dharma shastras* or the social and legal codes of the Hindus, typically identified by the law giver, Manu. *Varna* is to be distinguished from *jati* or caste though the two are otherwise complexly related. Not to be counted among the four *varnas* (Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vasishya, and Shudra) rendered an individual *asavarna* or outside the pale of Hindu society. The ritually defiled and marginalized jatis were identified with this category. Many notable Indian thinkers agreed with the varna system but not that based on jati mistakenly believing that the varna system remained essentially a system based on division of labor. Incidentally, the only community that qualifies to be both a varna and a jati are Brahmins.

9

THE IDEAL HINDU DIET

*In this worldly life, man has several tasks to perform and hence has several objectives before him as for instance seeking education, earning a livelihood, the upkeep of the self and family, and serving his community and the nation. But the noblest among these objectives is to seek personal salvation by leading a morally and spiritually pure life….

Look closely and you will find that all work that people perform is founded on a moral and spiritual order (dharma). Depending upon the manner in which some work is performed, it can be either consistent with dharma or opposed to it. It is for this reason that in our law codes (*dharmashastra*) there is simply no work that falls outside the scope of dharma or is untouched by it. Detailed instructions have been laid down with regard to how each work is to be carried out … this only proves that the Hindu *shastras* take dharma to be far-reaching and comprehensive in its scope and why dharmic conduct itself rests on the right observances of several rites and rituals. This association between right conduct and the correct means to attain it is nowhere as clear as it is to the Hindu. To observe dharmic values everywhere and to observe appropriate steps to sustain is the unique quality in the Hindu alone, in Hinduism, and in Hindutva….

In our law codes, the space devoted to social and ritual prescriptions is astonishingly large since there are detailed descriptions available for carrying out a variety of everyday acts such as following morning ablutions, bathing, or consuming food and drink. It is simply impossible to list these in this essay. Fortunately, a great soul among us has undertaken a detailed

* Excerpted from "Ahar" in Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 136–169.

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exposition of these rites and rituals which have been appearing regularly in the pages of the *Education Gazette*[1]….

Everyone consumes food but not all of us make a constructive effort to scruple between the food we ought to eat and that which we eat regularly as a matter of habit. Such choices are not exercised in Europe. In India, Muslims discriminate in matters of food and drink, but the manner in which they carry this out is not widely known. Some of us imagine that the Muslims stay away from pork only. But this is not the truth of the matter. Many articles of food besides pork are forbidden in Islam. Food which is permitted to the Muslim is called "Halal" and that forbidden, "Haram". In the latter category, many kinds of meat are included … Islamic texts do not spell out the reasons why some meats are excluded from the ideal Muslim diet, but wise and experienced Muslims are heard to say that eating such meats are likely to cause human beings to acquire the characteristics of those species of the bird or animal kingdom that have been slaughtered for the table. This suggests that food not only affects the body but also the mind … Europeans are known to pay some attention to examine how food affects our physical constitution; the Muslims, on the other hand, consider changes both on the mental plane as also the physical. We are not yet in a position to definitely state whether or not food also affects our mentality and yet there is no doubt in my mind that those who duly reflect on the effects that food has on our mental and physical well being are possessed of greater spiritual insight. It is also quite evident that compared to the European, the Muslims conform more to the idea of following moral and religious codes equally in matters of food and drink….

That food is vital for the nourishment of our bodies is accepted by Hindus just as much by others. However, only Hindus argue that it is sinful not to take proper care of the body. This is because in Hinduism the highest objective behind a healthy or sound body is to suitably use it for leading a dharmic life. Naturally, where there is a ruling, greater attention will be paid to the choice of the food eaten … none but the Hindu has so examined the properties with such seriousness and concern; of this there is only a trace detectable in the writings of Comte[2]….

The animal kingdom can be broadly divided into two categories: the carnivorous and the herbivorous. Of these, the carnivorous are generally irritable, violent, and aggressive in temperament; the herbivorous, by comparison, are gentle and peace loving … the carnivorous cannot be domesticated or used for any productive work beneficial to man. They are perpetually prone to killing and destruction with a shorter lifespan. On the other hand, domesticated animals like cows, buffalos, goats, sheep, horses, or elephants give themselves up to man's control and help us carry out many helpful and productive functions. Their lifespan exceeds that of the carnivorous animals. Even among marine creatures, carnivorous species like sharks

or crocodiles prefer to live by themselves rather than in groups. On the contrary, river fish as well as domesticated animals like cows and buffalos reveal the tendency to live collectively; in them, one may find the propensity to form communities. History reveals that among human beings too, those given to the consumption of animal flesh are selfish, cruel, destructive, aggressive, irritable, and prone to outbursts of anger. Vegetarians do not reveal these qualities….

Since a long time, Europe has been affected by a continuous conflict marked by violence and aggression. The ancient Greeks and Romans are known to have been victims to this. We are given to understand that this comes in the wake of Europeans trying to bring civilization to the rest of the world. This is something that the Europeans say only to gratify themselves. In truth, this aggression and violence have arisen from malafide intentions and will continue to do so. Among Hindus who take to a vegetarian diet, such aggression has never been found. Hindus have been engaged in wars but among them all but a just and righteous war is condemned….

Those who do not scruple about what they eat or drink can never gain purity of character. Whether it be in Asia, Europe, or America, signs of pure character will always indicate a careful choice of food and drink and a moderate diet … Hinduism especially teaches us that without the right choice of food, one cannot develop nobility of character and advance in spiritual life….

Admittedly, all food that is prohibited in Hinduism may not adversely affect our mentality/There are errors in all religious traditions and Hinduism is no exception. Hence, there is no harm in assuming that all food does not adversely affect our mental health even though some of these may be traditionally prohibited. Consuming such food occasionally will not affect one's standing as a Hindu or tarnish the reputation of Hinduism. On the other hand, if one completely gives up scrupling about food or drink, this is bound to adversely affect one's identity as a Hindu. This is because one of the principal characteristics of Hinduism alone is to associate the kind of food consumed with the qualities of spiritual life.

The first objective related to food is bodily nourishment and the second, the strengthening of the soul. Only that food which provides both may be deemed as good food. Only India has maintained that eating for the sake of nourishing the body alone is opposed to righteous conduct. However, even in India, this view is no longer as clearly or consistently maintained as was once the case. Many of us do not know why one must scruple about the food consumed; they blindly follow the old domestic manuals. Many traditional scholars are aware of the association of food with our well-being but more often than not they desist from sharing such knowledge with the common people. Hence, there is now a need for extending public instruction. We must see to it that every household is suitably instructed in the choice of right

food and drink. English-educated Hindus do not scruple about what they eat and are not likely to take to purer ways of life; those who blindly follow conventions out of fear of social persecution will also eventually take to the ways of the English educated….

It is only on account of their moral degeneration that men are so strongly tempted by food. Food that is consumed only for the sake of bodily nourishment is relatively inferior, but even such food is better than those which cause only greed and gluttony … the gluttonous do not pause to think of what leads them to eat; like the common beast, they are merely tempted by the sight of food….

Regardless of how lowly and ignorant a man may be, it is wrong to consume food out of sheer greed. If you are required to carry out hard physical labor and if this requires you consuming fish and flesh, then you must take to eating those by all means. Under these circumstances, not eating animal food will constitute a violation of right conduct. But even if you should be required to eat meat, do not consume it greedily … do remember that you have an afterlife to think about and thoughts about afterlife are no less important than those concerning everyday life in this world. Thus, even if you do not always consume pure (*sattvik*) food, at least try and adopt the right approach to food and diet … I do not discourage all animal food; it is not even my intention to sit in judgment over whether vegetarian food is superior to non-vegetarian. All that I am trying to argue is that one should be judicious in the selection of food….

By a vegetarian diet I do not mean a diet completely devoid of fish or flesh. I savor fish every day and meat occasionally. Even so, in relation to the European's diet, our food may justly be called mainly vegetarian, and if advancing sufficiently in our spiritual life be our goal, it is important that we desist from eating fish or flesh in excess … in matters concerning spiritual life, our ancestors held the most exalted position and yet there was indeed a time when they consumed plenty of animal food. Eventually, they chose to cut down on the consumption of such food; that the excessive consumption of meat is not conducive to a spiritual life is clearly borne out by their actions….

It is important to realize that we do not subscribe to recommended rituals and rites for the sake of mere conformity. We must, at all times, remember that the underlying objective is to progress along spiritual lines. Failing to remember this truth will cause no small harm to ourselves. At the present times, we often resort to lying, to cheating, swindling; we rob others and give ourselves to believe that we are well on the path of leading a virtuous life … there is no greater sin than taking pride in following prescribed rites and customs. It is good that we follow these rites voluntarily but why abuse or despise those who do not follow them? The sacred texts of Hinduism all preach universalism and fraternity; they cannot possibly recommend that you pervert and abuse the Universal Soul reflected in you. Understandably

enough, our scriptures discourage fraternizing with the *mleccha*,[3] and this is born of the fear that such practices will produce undesirable results in us. But where does it say that the *mleccha* must be hated or despised? In order to avoid acquiring the qualities of the wicked, it is recommended that we avoid keeping the company of the wicked. But where is the mandate to hate them? You despise the low born *Chandal*,[4] but our *shastras* say that even the *Chandal* has a few things to teach us….

I have a clue as to why you despise such people; you do so because you have lost sight of the principles underlying the practice of our rites and rituals. You no longer possess the sense of righteousness or the ethically cleansed soul (*chittashuddhi*)[5] which was really the underlying purpose behind conforming to rites and rituals. Hence you hate the *mleccha* as someone who does not conform to your social and ritual codes. Little do you realize that in ignoring the true purpose behind the observance of prescribed social and ritual codes, you have come to regard even the thoughtless observance of these codes as what is compulsorily required of you. In so doing, you have yourself turned into a *mleccha*, perhaps even the *mleccha* among *mlecchas*….

In the Hindu tradition, the observance of right customs and rites follows from the capacity to uphold the ways of dharmic righteousness in every aspect governing our everyday lives. If you were to claim that this view of life was distinctive to your civilization and practiced solely by your ancestors, this great legacy is indeed yours to carry forward, an exemplary way to establish your identity in the world. But this will also demand that your ancestors and you too adopt the dharmic way of life. Failing that, your Hindutva will be empty of all values as will be Hinduism itself….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: The reference *h*ere is the work *Achar Prabandha* by Bhudeb Mukhpadhyay that was serialized in the weekly journal *Education Gazette* edited by him between 31 January 1890 and 8 September 1893. The work was published as a book in 1895. This work opens with the Sanskrit *sloka* "Dharmohasya Mulani" (All righteous acts are founded in Dharma).
2 Author's Note: Except in his *Catechism of Religion*.
3 Editor's Note: A socially derogatory term used in pre-modern India to refer to people belonging to non-Hindu cultures, especially Muslims, and based on both religious differences and the concept of ritual pollution from contact and cohabitation. In modern India, this was at times extended to Christians.
4 Editor's Note: A ritually highly defiled jati mostly associated with tanning, leather work, service at cremation grounds, and other menial work.
5 Editor's Note: Literally meaning cleansing of the soul through moral acts and thought. In traditional Hinduism, this was not regarded as an independent path to salvation since morality was subservient to religion.

10

FORBEARANCE IN THE HINDU TRADITION

*When comparing itself to Asia, Europe acclaims itself as a land of endurance and progress. Asia itself is accused of being self-indulgent and prone to decadence or degeneration. It is indeed somewhat surprising that a knowledgeable and scholarly Europe should think so poorly of the Hindus in particular. It is not my intention to suggest that referring to us as the "ease loving Oriental" is completely baseless. Admittedly, what Europe calls the powers of endurance and industriousness Asia does not possess in sufficient measure. To tirelessly wander around the world, disregarding extreme heat or cold, climbing the highest mountain peaks, to journey through a blazing desert, to cut through rocky terrain in order to lay down railway tracks, to dig canals through sand – such exciting and tireless labor or hardiness does not characterize Asians. But are Asians truly indolent, ease loving and given to self-indulgence? Surely, I cannot answer this question on behalf of all Asians. Instead, I shall try to determine whether or not the Hindus are a hardy and industrious race…and in determining this, I shall primarily seek the help of our literature. There are two reasons behind this. First, the activities of the Hindus are all in the past and no reliable records survive that may be taken as evidence. Second, even assuming that there was evidence in support of this claim elsewhere, it has to be said that literary evidence is superior in nature. Literature bears testimony not simply to sundry activities but many things more. It bears testimony to the strength and intelligence, hopes, ideals, and aspirations, relating to the past, present, and future pertaining to our race. It is only the characteristic qualities identified with a nation that gives birth to national literature.

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Tushanal" and "Kodakranti (Sudurgamita)" in *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 91–101 and 107–118.

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By virtue of the traditional system of education in this country, all classes of people, be they young boys or grown up adults, the ignorant and the wise, the poor and the rich, humble people and the mighty, have all heard of instructive tales carried in our religious books and hence, no one needs to be reminded of how these books are filled with tales of sadness and suffering, troubles and forbearance, and the willingness to undergo self-sacrifice. Greek literature too is full of such tales. In Europe, Sophocles, Aeschylus, and Shakespeare have between them produced more tragic stories than anyone else. But in these tales, the sense of tragedy is short lived. In Greek plays and in those by Shakespeare, there is a perennial presence of anger, jealousy, and impatience which goes on waxing by the minute and hour, and yet we do not encounter in this literature characters which remain unmoved by the ordeals they undergo. Such qualities can be found in the literature of the Hindus alone. The child bride of a royal family voluntarily accompanies her husband to the forest … and what difficulties she had to put up with in the several years to follow! And as though that was not trouble enough, she had to put up with much more; that chaste and devoted wife had also to put up with separation from her husband. The troubles she had to put up with for the sake of her husband ended up in the bride being forced to live in enemy territory. Once she overcame her captivity and was returned to the husband, there arose the terrible ordeal by fire (*agnipariksha*) at his own behest[1] … it is as though the Hindu willingly coveted pain and suffering, to endure these boldly and thereby set inspiring examples for posterity to follow. Let us also recall the story of King Harishchandra[2] … fate willed that the king had to undergo his share of misfortune and hence, the relentless and exacting Hindu poet had him undergo in the shortest passage of time, the pain and suffering that could otherwise have been experienced over an entire eon (*yuga*). This is exactly why I say that when speaking of human endurance one must recall the Hindu, not the European….

Then there is the story of King Ushinara,[3] the dove, and the falcon. In time, this story reached the shores of Europe as many other tales of this kind earlier had. But Europeans paid no heed to the underlying moral of the story; they never ventured to offer a piece of their own flesh to save somebody in distress. Instead, they wondered what gains Ushinara could possibly have made through his extraordinary act of self-sacrifice. Fearing for his life, a character in a European play,[4] when asked to part with a piece of his flesh as a penalty for failing to meet his obligations, resorted to specious legal arguments in his defense. And lest people accuse him of indecisiveness or cowardice, the blame for not meeting his obligations he laid at the doors of a Jew! By writing that play, Shakespeare unwittingly took upon himself the infamy of an unjust act. Modern European critics have argued that it was only fair that a tyrannical money lender like Shylock could not have his way, and this, in effect, meant that ultimately, no injustice was done! What an

awful argument to offer! When men do need moral conventions to work, is it not proper to fall back on universal norms and ideals? What exactly is this universal ideal? Is it not true that in keeping with God's laws, man has often to undergo many chastising experiences of pain and suffering? Is it necessary for us to violate the laws of God? Europeans are guilty of such violations, never the Hindu….

The Hindu poet labeled the sage Visvamitra[5] as "cruel" going by the way he would not let up on the *gurudakshina* and insisted that the pupil Harishchandra pay up or risk disastrous consequences. We know that this caused immense suffering and deprivation to Harishchandra and yet our poet did not accuse the sage of wrongdoing! Why did he not do so? This is because our poet had faith in God's will and in his laws. Just because a man was suffering could not be a reason for suspending these inexorable and universal laws or somehow altering them. And why, if we may ask, should Visvamitra be made to give up his demands. Let us remember also how, regardless of the great suffering he had to go through, Harishchandra carried his promise to the hilt; it was all along his intention to redeem his debts and fulfill his vow. None but a Hindu can think thus and willingly bring misery upon himself for the sake of respecting God's laws. Had Europe been willing to carry out the same, we would not have had a character like Shylock.

Both Europeans and Hindus can withstand suffering but not with the same intentions. Europe does it for the sake of material and tangible benefits, the Hindu for the sake of fulfilling his moral and religious (*dharmic*) duties; the European suffers for the sake of greater bodily powers or functions, the Hindu for the sake of advancing his soul; the European acts for himself, the Hindu for the other. Both forms of suffering can bring improvement and progress but palpably of different kinds; improvement related to the external and to the internal respectively. Admittedly, the Hindu lacks the external, the European the internal. Some argue that even though the Hindu's path is superior, relying on this alone would have led to the collapse of the Hindu civilization. Is this not true of Europe too? On closer inspection it would emerge that whereas the Hindu would have eventually had a truncated physical self, Europe, on the other hand, would have lost its very soul. Let the reader decide which of these two outcomes is the more dishonorable. Both in India and abroad, it is held that he who fights for a good cause (*dharmayuddha*) is sure to reach heaven. The truth of the matter is that self-destruction is not inevitable for those upholding dharma. The Hindu has not lost his political freedom on this account. At the time Hindus were fighting Muslims for control of India, they still had enough military prowess. We may grant that they had not yet developed feelings of patriotism; on the other hand, the instance of the Rajput states reveals to us the way in which loyalty to the king could be harnessed for a love of the

country as a whole. Such love we had in plenty. Why, then, was the Hindu subjugated? Our enquiry reveals that the reason why the Greeks lost their independence despite being patriotic also applies to Hindus, that is, division and disunity among the people. There is one other matter. If those abiding by dharma are doomed to die, dharma itself must be a terrible thing to accept. But will people accept this characterization of dharma? Perhaps not….

You may cite the instance of Europe to argue that unless he adopts a self-seeking position, the Hindu cannot possibly acquire the qualities of activism and industriousness. But may I ask who gave you to believe this? History reveals how primitive man, once self-seeking, self-contained, and as temperamental as a beast, developed feelings of altruism once he was part of a family and domestic life. These institutions made him understanding and responsible. This new morality is the foundation of all fruitful human activity….

Are the values that the Hindus of early India possessed still going strong? Perhaps some of it still is. Even today the degree to which the Hindu householder is committed to social service and improvement is not found among Europeans … it is apparent though that much of the value system of the early Hindus has now visibly eroded, especially among the English educated … even so, in the powers of forbearance lies the Hindutva of the Hindus and their greatness … once we lose this forbearance and the power to endure adversity, we will be doomed as a nation. In any case, as matters stand today, our present is bleak, and our future as a people may soon cease to exist.

There can be no progress without the powers of endurance and endurance itself rests on hopes … I do not wish to suggest that the Hindu who has hitherto endured the several daunting tasks put before him sitting at home should not venture out into the larger world with an eye on acquiring greater knowledge and wealth. On the contrary, he must be seen to do this since this will prepare him even better to overcome the new difficulties and challenges that are bound to come his way. However, one needs to strike a balance between the two paths; suffice to say here that the older of the two paths is undoubtedly superior….

It is our duty to ensure that the Hindu occupies the position of the master chef in the gigantic kitchen that now serves modern science and that you are served the choicest ingredients for the special broth, gathered from all corners of the world by other people. Your history ought to teach you that that indeed is your destiny. In the early days of mankind, you functioned as the teacher of humanity, so should your functions be in the current times. In case you doubt my words, take the following as an example. We are now able to overtake even the modern Englishman in knowledge and competition precisely because in you there still reside traces of that extraordinary and

supernatural powers of endurance that once flowed in our revered ancestors. Should you now be able to enhance the skills and the strength that brings about human improvement, the world will undoubtedly bow down before you and pay the reverence due to the Aryan!

II

Our currency system is more neatly and elaborately structured compared to that of many others. Each of the units that the currency is divided into is important for us. The English pay no heed to the smallest denominations in their currency and these are not taken into consideration when accounting. On the contrary, we do not trifle with the smallest denomination….

In his everyday running of this world, the Creator takes into account the smallest of details as does his creation. Our Universe is subject to certain immutable and irreversible laws. There can never be any change in the time taken by light from a star to hit a certain planet. The sound of thunder can reach your ears only at a precisely measured time. There can never be any violation of any natural cosmic laws, and the Hindu believes that this is a law that also applies to the spiritual world. God does not let up on the smallest operative details when it comes to running the world. It is precisely for this reason that the Hindu never relaxes when it comes to obeying certain social conventions. He has adequately reflected on the importance of accepting and adhering to these conventions and making arrangements for running them effectively….

Our *shastras* insist that a girl be married before she goes into her menses; the consequences of not complying with this prescription are said to be disastrous. What intentions lie behind this injunction? Is this simply a matter of ignorance and superstition? Some readers may have heard of the story concerning sage Visvamitra and his pupil Galab.[6] At the end of his tutelage, Galab offered to pay his mentor a token fee (*gurudakshina*) as was then customary. At first, Visvamitra declined the gift knowing Galab to be a man of modest means. But Galab's insistence irritated him. Infuriated, he asked that 800 horses of good breed be gifted to him as his *dakshina*. Now there was no way in which Galab could have offered the sage such a precious gift. It was thus that he approached King Yayati[7] for help in meeting his obligations, but the king pleaded his inability. "My treasury is now empty", he said, "and hence, I am not in a position to procure those horses for you. But here is what you can do. I have a beautiful daughter by the name of Madhavi whom you should get married to some powerful and affluent king. Once the king has a son by that marriage he will surely help you. Heeding this advice, Galab got Madhavi married to King Haryashva[8] of the Ikshvaku dynasty[9] and subsequently, a son was born to the couple. Pleased with this outcome, Haryashva gifted Galab 200 horses

and returned Madhavi too. By virtue of a boon previously granted to her, Madhavi was soon transformed into a virgin once more and this enabled Galab to get her married yet another time to a king who also obtained a son by this marriage. This king gifted another 200 horses to Galab and returned Madhavi as before. The boon worked again, turning Madhavi into a virgin who was then married off to a third king. In this manner, Galab was able to eventually pay off his debts. The moral of the story simply is that only a virgin may be married, not a woman who has been once married. But that is not all. Now listen to the story of the universally revered Savitri.

At her father's behest Savitri chose Satyavan as her husband but sage Narada warned them that Satyavan was doomed to die within a year of marriage. The father, King Ashvapati, then requested his daughter to look for another suitor. To this Savitri replied thus:

> The following acts are performed but once. The substance of a commodity is destroyed only once; a daughter is gifted in marriage only once and the expression "dadani" (I hereby give away) is uttered only once. Hence, regardless of whether or not Satyavan is blessed with a long life; whether or not he possesses good qualities are immaterial now that I have chosen him as my husband. I can choose no other[10]

According to Savitri, evidently, a marriage purely on the mental plane was just as valid as in deed. He who resided in the mind of a woman as the husband was the true husband. Conventional wisdom reveals that upon attaining puberty, women begin to covet the bodily company of men, and if somehow that desire is not satiated, the mind is very likely to be tainted if not also the character. Europeans argue that if the unmarried woman is sufficiently guarded against impure thoughts and substances, their mind and character will be saved from corruption. But that is an extremely difficult task to accomplish. Further, due to their great bodily excitement, women harbor the same thoughts inside them as they reveal publicly. Their menstrual flow is strong evidence of their physical transformation and the palpable desire for male company as an outward expression of this transformation. Hence, it simply cannot be enough to control our social environment, the mind too must be kept under strict control. If a girl remains unmarried even after signs of menses have appeared in her, it is very likely that lustful thoughts about men and male company will occupy her mind. No less a person than Savitri herself has affirmed that he alone who is mentally acknowledged as the husband is the true husband. Under the circumstances, if a girl is not married to the man she desires, she would naturally be prone to willful adultery (*byavichar*) … marriage alone rules out such undesirable possibilities as the woman's mind comes to be fixed on the husband. This explains why Hindu

shastras are so strict about following certain social prescriptions about marriage and wedlock. Once we loosen our control over such social habits, the value attached to a chaste woman (*sati*) is bound to be sharply eroded.

The fear of mental adultery is to be found even in Christianity.[11] But practically speaking, Christians don't attach much value to a woman's mental chastity; they do not appear to construct ideal marital vows and obligations based on such concerns. They don't go down to the smallest detail in matters of ritual observances as the Hindus are known to do. Farsightedness and scrupulous attention to detail are the defining signs of the Hindu, the religion of the Hindus, and of Hindutva itself.

A few years back, it was reported that in a certain Bengal district, a man accompanying his mother-in-law raped her on the way home. We ask: of what sin is a man not capable! And if such recurring sinfulness cannot be prevented, is it not fair that people be sufficiently alerted about their moral weaknesses and vulnerability? Our lawmakers, fully apprised of our frailties, were no doubt relentless and exacting in their social prescriptions, but they were equally open to explaining what compelled them to be so. This proves their farsightedness.

On close scrutiny, you are also bound to find many more instances of such strict social controls being laid down for Hindu society. Admittedly, in some cases this strictness is excessive; sometimes they are reasonable and at other times they are not. However, this is not the place for determining the reasonableness of social strictures laid down for the Hindus. Suffice to say that even when these are heavy-handed and excessively strict in their application, they have, in the end, benefited the Hindu for they were founded in thoroughness and genuine concern.

In substance, the Hindu insistence on uncompromising thoroughness was always with an eye on the future of the community. The effort to merge with the *Brahman* also reflects the same mental disposition: the attainment of wholeness and completeness. These are both important and represent the essence of the Hindu, of the Hindu's religion, and of Hindutva.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: The reference here is to Sita from the epic *Ramayana*.
2 Editor's Note: The story of Harishchandra is an extremely popular story and is to be found at several places within the corpus of Hindu literature as, for instance, *Aitreya Brahmana*, the *Mahabharata*, *Devi Bhagavata Purana*, and the *Markandeya Purana*. Essentially a story associated with the truthfulness and resolute character in a man who endured great trouble and suffering for the sake of upholding the truth. The tale is associated with the city of Benares where a certain embankment is named after him. The tale of Harishchandra was hugely celebrated in the Indian print media, drama, and films.
3 Editor's Note: The story of Ushinara also occurs in the *Mahabharata* and represents the edifying tale of self-sacrifice and magnanimity. Briefly put, the story

goes as follows: The gods once decided to test king Ushinara for his heroic qualities of courage and self sacrifice and so, Lords Indra and Agni once appeared before him in the guise of a falcon and dove, respectively. The falcon was seen chasing the dove, who, in fear for its life, sought refuge with the king in the hope that he would save it from the falcon. Much as Ushinara tried to dissuade the falcon from claiming its prey, the falcon would not agree and eventually asked the King to barter his own flesh or the life of the dove. King Ushinara happily agreed, offering his flesh to the falcon until reduced to a mere skeleton. At this marvelous act of selflessness, the gods made arrangements for him to ascend to the heavens. Incidentally, an identical story is also narrated in the Buddhist *Jatakas* concerning King Shibi, the son of Ushinara.

4 Editor's Note: The reference here is to *The Merchant of Venice* by William Shakespeare.

5 Editor's Note: A well-known sage in the Hindu tradition belonging to the Kshatriya Varna, who, by the dint of hard austerity and penance, rose to the status of Brahmin. This is said to have unleashed a conflict between himself and the Brahmin born sage, Vaishistha.

6 Editor's Note: The story occurs in the *Mahabharata*, Udyog Parva, Chapter 113.

7 Editor's Note: Mythical King in the Hindu tradition belonging to the lunar (*Chandravamshi*) dynasty is said to be the progenitor of the clan of Yadavas and of the Pandavas.

8 Editor's Note: A mythological king in the Hindu tradition, the *Mahabharata* shows him to be the ruler of Kashi.

9 Editor's Note: A solar dynasty (*Suryavanshi*) founded by the legendary Ikshvaku. The dynasty is associated with the Kosala region in early India, corresponding to present day Uttar Pradesh.

10 Author's Note: Based on Kalprasanna Singha's translation of *Mahabharata*. Vanaparva, Chapter 293.

11 Editor's Note: Here the author reproduces a passage from Matthew 5.28 in support of his argument.

11

THE WORLD AS A MART

The Source of Happiness and Aesthetic Delight

*Since his birth on this planet, man has been consistently seeking happiness. He has also come to the conclusion that this world is bereft of happiness and should there be some traces of it, these would be extremely difficult to find. The world is taken to be full of anxiety, agony, and tears and man has come to believe that he is fated to suffer unhappiness all his life.

Religious preachers in all lands and at all times have ruled that happiness can be procured only in heaven and not on earth; that it may be found not in earthly life but in life after death. Christian preachers are heard to say that earthly life is but a moral trial ground for man and the consequences of these trials are manifest only in the afterlife.

People like me who are not religious counselors keep looking for happiness, hoping that someday they will find it concealed in some corner or in some unexpected substance. Driven by this belief, we keep experimenting, hoping to find happiness through varied exertions. But what is the truth here? Can happiness truly not be found on this earth? And even if it should be found, is it too rare to obtain, too miniscule to measure? Does happiness imply continuous exploration of the unknown? No, that is not quite the case. In truth, happiness is beyond measure; it is boundless….

This infinite and everlasting world is an open mart of boundless joy and happiness. Can you imagine how many articles of delight are on offer in this market place, as large and expansive as the word itself? There is virtually no end to the number of such articles or to their immense variety, filling my

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Sukher Haat O Soudaryer Mela" in *Tridhara*. Calcutta. Haranath Basu. 3rd ed. 1907 (1st ed. 1900): 40–48.

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heart with joy and a somber thought touched by joy. Within each of these articles on display lies hidden boundless and ecstatic joy….

A sight of the majestic Himalayas that reminds you of the Infinite Power of God also creates ripples of pleasure. But do you not also perceive the Infinite within the tiny grain of sand? … On serious reflection you shall find that all that is contained in the universe is unbounded by any limits. Just as this universe is infinite so is the tiny grain of sand….

Rabindra Babu[1] in his work titled *Alochana* maintains that the universe is reflected in every single yard of this earth. Be that as it may, we could justly extend the analogy by stating that not just the universe but the Lord of the universe Himself is present in every grain of sand. Hence, when conceived mentally and through our spiritual eyes, everything in this world will appear to be infinite and limitless….

In the vast market place, one need not arduously look for sources of pleasure; merely opening one's eyes wider will reveal numerous such articles of joy. Simply choose what you will and you are bound to discover new sources of joy. Those vendors in the market place who offer you countless delightful objects expect nothing from you in return. All they expect in you are thoughts on God. Meditate on God and you shall find these vendors shower on you these priceless objects of pleasure and joy without your having to pay for these. Without seriously trying to understand what this world and God truly represent, men cry hoarse about the world being an abode of unhappiness. For this indiscretion they continue to undergo extreme anguish and pain.

There is something called beauty on this earth, but this does not exist in every worldly object. Only those objects which carry beauty within them bring pleasure and happiness to people. In European literature, these questions are dealt with in aesthetics. Those of us who have studied aesthetics will no doubt say that since only some subjects are beautiful, it would be untenable to claim that all objects can produce infinite pleasure and joy. But there is a counter perspective. If we were to view worldly objects with our natural sight, some objects will indeed appear to be beautiful and others uncouth and ugly … in this vision a rose or a majestic mountain can never be compared to an ordinary mound of earth or something as commonplace as the *akanda* flower,[2] but when viewed through power of the inner mind, they lose their distinctiveness. In natural vision, objects can be seen in varying shapes, sizes, and color … but when employing the powers of the mind to perceive the Divine Presence within these, all classifications disappear.

Are we then to think that the beauty in objects, seen through ordinary sense perceptions is false and inconsequential? That would be a grossly erroneous claim to make. Beauty perceived in nature too is real, substantive, and the source of great joy. And there is every reason why this should be so since these also reflect Divinity or Divine Presence. But let me introduce a word of caution here. If, for instance, the beauty visible to us through sense

perception inhibits us from perceiving other kinds of beauty, such perceptions should be strictly avoided. A person may be greatly attached to an object of natural beauty and refuse to cognize any other object that does not carry the same degree of natural beauty. Such a man may be ranked a major poet or a man gifted with the most sophisticated tastes but never a man of the most exalted qualities. It would be reasonable to say that in him humanity is far from developed. European aesthetic trends turn men partial to beauty derived from sense perceptions and that leads him to more sharply differentiate the beautiful from the ugly than is commonly done in India. The literature of the Hindus does not reveal the chaos and confusion that arises from too categorically making qualitative differentiation between objects….

European literature praises form for the sake of form alone, beauty for the sake of beauty, daintiness and grace merely for their own sake. The Hindu perceives the presence of the Divine in every object and hence his literature does not proceed to categorize objects into the beautiful and the ugly; it does not also allow notions of natural and sensual beauty to dominate our judgment. It is because the European sees the created world as apart from the Creator that he is forced to maintain these synthetic distinctions with some rigidity….

The Hindu sages were men of exalted character and this allowed them to view the world primarily on the mental plane. And because they were able to do so, they could not but perceive the world as an abode of joy and happiness. The greatest men of Europe, notwithstanding their noble qualities, were not able to ascend to the highest plane of human existence. This led them to split the world into two hemispheres of the good and the bad, happy and the unhappy. Exasperated by their failure to locate human happiness, they remain perpetually in a state of dissatisfaction and restlessness. It is because the spiritual qualities of the European were on a relatively lower scale that the concern with aesthetics assumes such disproportionate importance. In India, the spiritual content in man is of a very high order and this has scaled down the importance of aesthetics. We might even say that aesthetics has dissolved itself in the huge cauldron of spirituality. Humanity will not ascend to its highest state of existence unless we are able to subordinate aesthetics to our spiritual life….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: The reference here is to the poet Rabindranath Tagore.
2 Editor's Note: Botanical Name: *Calotropis Gigantea*, a wild flower commonly found in south and southeast Asia. In Hinduism, this is holy to Lord Siva.

12

LESSONS IN SELF-DISCIPLINING AND THE FOUNDATIONS OF CHARACTER

*The impact that the outer world made and substances in it have on the human mind is naturally very strong. The external world is associated with our sense perceptions based on sight, hearing, smell, taste, etc. This explains why man is so compellingly drawn to gratify himself through exercising the senses in the manner of animals. When this occurs, he ceases to pay attention to any moral judgment, separating the good from the bad, that which benefits from that which causes harm. The inner world and the outer are situated at opposite ends. Hence, he who focuses on the outer world finds it difficult to enter the inner; the more he stays focused on the outer world the less likely are the possibilities of his returning to the inner world. However, humanity, nobility of the heart, religiosity, and thoughts on god all belong to the inner world. Our sense perceptions not only fail to find these in the outer world, they also create obstacles on the possibilities of our locating them in the inner. Our senses find the outer world very attractive and to travel along worldly paths brings them greater delight and satisfaction. On the other hand, entry into the inner world is quite difficult and daunting.

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: *Sanjam Shikkha ba Nimnatam Sopan*. Calcutta. Bengal Medical Library. 1904: 1–118. By 1909 (4th ed.). The book was condensed into about 100 pages from the original 136. The book went into its 13th and possibly the last reprint in 1922. The book was approved by the Director of Public Instructions as a school text book for High Schools and middle-level classes in west Bengal and east Bengal districts. This translation ends at pg. 118 of the 1st edition. Pages 119–136 could not be located. In fact, for some unknown reason, these appear to have not been digitized at all. From internal evidence, we do know, however, that these missing pages carried an excerpt from Bhudeb Mukhopadhyay's *Paribarik Prabandha*.

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Hence, our senses prefer not to travel along those paths. They cannot, by themselves, enter this world and prevent us from entering it too. However, that is a path that must be traveled since that is the path that destroys our animal instincts; that is the path that allows us to be human; that is the path that takes us to God. It is for this reason that we must keep our sense perception from invading our inner world before they gather in strength and turn invincible. This implies that we must prepare to find ways to control our senses, even prior to taking birth. However, the external world cannot be done away with; nor is it advisable to do so. We must keep our relations with the outer world alive so long as we continue to be in our gross physical bodies. The ideal path would be to ensure that the outer world does not make our gross physical bodies even more gross, take control of our senses, or lead men into wrongful paths by giving them wrong advice. When fully controlled by their senses, men turn into their own enemies, refusing to act upon good advice. At that stage, they turn impervious to the noblest truths contained in our moral and religious texts and refuse to act upon them….

To gain humanity and live the life expected of a human being, it is essential that we overcome the power and attractions of the world outside us. We cannot do without the world, and therefore, what we need to do is to regulate the powers of influence that it naturally has on us….

Many wise and knowledgeable people among us are now trying to instruct us through good advice. However, such advice has not yielded the desired results since we possess neither the strength, nor the mental disposition or the capacity to gainfully observe rites and observances which will produce the desired qualities for us … it is of no use to repeatedly advise people to exercise self-control; such control can come about only through a committed cultivation of certain processes in a prescribed way. This book has been written with the intention of enabling people to practically learn ways of self-control, to make such qualities a part of our natural self-inclination.

The recommendations I have made in this book are only elementary in nature. Our moral and religious texts prescribe a course of action that is higher and more difficult to follow. I have refrained from speaking about these in any detail; what I have done instead is to identify the basic principles on which our highest ideals can be made to rest. Unless these basic disciplines are successfully mastered, pursuing others that exist on a much higher plane would be quite useless. The title given to this book aptly fits this argument….

We are constantly seeking the material world and feel deeply attracted by it. As I have earlier argued, it is because of our engrossment in this world that we hesitate to embrace fellow men. Right across my modest dwelling, you have now built an imposing palace. That created much jealousy and heart burning, turning me into your sworn enemy. People praise your book and not mine and you instantly become a thorn in my flesh! Or imagine a

situation where I am the affluent person who lives in a mansion and travels in fancy horse carriages and you are but a poor, much troubled person. When you appear before me in ragged clothes, I choose not to speak to you out of feelings of hatred. How will I ever be possibly close to you?

There may arise a pertinent question here. It is not as though we alone are mesmerized by worldly splendor. Europeans are even more so. Among them, the pursuit of the material world is unimaginably strong. And yet, when they collectively work for material gains, they achieve greater success than us. Why does this happen? We can think of two possible reasons for this. First, in our country, social dissensions arising in material life emerge sooner and in a greater measure than they do in Europe. In Europe, there is the tendency to create rivalry and ill feeling not merely between individuals but also nations and communities. Ironically enough, this fosters greater strength or unity within members of a certain community against another. This makes it possible for collective action to be more fruitful in Europe. In India, we do not develop the rivalry or animosity that strains the relationship between two nations or communities. Had that been the case, we might have fared better in our collective efforts.

In recent times, some such sentiments and a sense of inter-community rivalry have appeared in this country too. Hence our growing emphasis on the use of indigenous goods. However, I pray that India does not replicate the crass materialism and inter-community hostility now visible in Europe. I wish India's social and material improvement be founded on humanity alone. This is what we had experienced in early India and therefore, why not now? After all, Japan, which has followed the ancient ideals of India, has successfully traveled on this path.

The other reason behind what I have just described is the fact that the realization of the greater good calls for some selflessness on the part of individuals. The European realizes this more than we do. It is therefore that their collective actions succeed whereas ours fail. The pursuit of self-interest is partly founded on a concern for the other. Self-interest that can turn selfless is true self-interest and founded on religious principles. Europeans succeed more with the pursuit of their objectives simply because they more consistently acted along those lines. Self-control and self-disciplining help in ending our distracting infatuations and the outer world then ceases to control us….

C

Hindutva as Patriarchy

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13

HINDU MARRIAGES

*In our earthly life, celibacy is an important requirement and so is marriage which secures and strengthens social relationships. These are integral aspects of our dharmic life. Marriages are the basis of our social organization. Where there are no marriages, there cannot exist any society either … presently there is some talk in Europe in doing away with the institution of marriage altogether. I cannot say with any certainty if indeed this institution will cease to exist but should this happen, society will assume very strange qualities and with that will come profound changes in moral and political life. But we need not speculate on this issue since that eventuality is unlikely to occur soon. Even today, Europeans rest their social organization on the institution of marriage even though at several places this turns out to be only a legal contract, not a spiritual act. Our marriages are not contractual, they are very much founded on spiritual principles. The difference in the two cases arises from the fact that the chief objective in our lives, that is, liberation or the merging of the human soul with the divine (*Brahman*), is an extremely difficult and demanding a task. This requires directing all worldly acts to the fulfillment of this objective. Hindu marriages are in substance, spiritual acts….

In Europe, since everyday acts have no association with the spiritual, marriages too are not founded on spiritual needs. Although Europeans are

* Excerpted from "Vivaha" included in Chandranath Basu: *Hindutva. Hindur Prakrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1892: 190–232+ Appendix pp. 354–404. Revised and enlarged edition of paper read at the 8th Annual Convention of the Savitri Library, Calcutta (1887) and subsequently published as a 54 page pamphlet in 1887. The Savitri Library was founded in 1879 by Rajendra Dutta (1818–1889).

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often heard to argue that religiosity is man's greatest possession, this does not practically come through in their everyday acts….

The English nation is extremely fond of opulence and ostentation. Accumulation of wealth is the primary objective in their lives. With them this is a matter of both faith and action. Not surprisingly, the following appears in one of their school text books:

> Thrift means thriving and doing well in the world. If we wish to thrive we must spend our time and earning to our best advantage. In the first place, we must work hard. Even our leisure, our time for play must be passed in a way that which will best prepare as our work. In the second place, we must be very careful not to spend even a penny for anything we can do without[1]

Our scriptures by comparison, acknowledging the pursuit of a dharmic life to be the chief objective, have oriented all our worldly acts to the realization of this grand objective. As in the pursuit of wealth so also with dharma; in no way can the demands made on man be relaxed or any concession granted. It is therefore that all our common and recurring acts like eating, recreation, domestic duties, or marriage be made to serve the cause of dharma….

The aptness of the Hindu view on the need or functions of marriage has been only recently recognized by the followers of Comte in Europe, albeit only to a limited extent. Comte has openly declared that in the matter of religious faith or feelings of heart, the woman is far superior to the man and hence, without support coming from the woman, a man can never seek to fulfill his moral and spiritual needs….

Unlike English marriages, Hindu marriages are not solemnized merely by the man and woman agreeing to accept each other as married partners. Hindu marriages begin with the act of gifting and acceptance of that gift. In such marriages, the father or someone of equivalent status gifts the bride to the groom, but in this instance, the act of gifting does not transform the woman into a wife; she merely becomes the groom's property. According to Manu (IX.47), the partitioning of property, the gift of a daughter, and the pledge to gift can be performed but once in a lifetime. The purport of this statement is that just as property cannot be gifted multiple times, a daughter can be gifted only once. And by virtue of the act of gifting, the person who receives the gift becomes the master of the girl so gifted just as he would become the owner of the property gifted to him … in the light of Manu's recommendation, the daughter gifted away becomes the property of the husband; she becomes a mere possession as some common utensils gifted to a person might. This is no doubt an extremely embarrassing view of the matter. However, a different meaning is also forthcoming in this case.

Our ancient lawgivers did not consider a man to be a complete man all by himself; it is only when he is joined to a woman that he begins to be considered one … hence, she who has to be treated as a wife must be first taken to be the property belonging to her husband. How else will a man make her a partner and thereby fulfill his own needs? A contract cannot render a person somebody else's property. The sense of private ownership is possible only between a master and slave. Hence, the Hindu tradition resorts to the act of ritual gifting (*sampradan*) to render the woman the man's property. Admittedly, this weakens the position of the woman, reducing her to insignificance purely for the benefit of man. But when speaking from the woman's perspective, this is no small matter. Which woman but the Hindu has so selflessly served the husband? Nor will this ever be possible in other cultures. And yet for a woman to be treated like some material property brings only dishonor and disgrace upon the woman. It is therefore that the act of gifting and its acceptance remains an incomplete process. The act of gifting only creates a sense of ownership for the man; it does not provide him with a married partner. That process is completed through enacting the *shaptapadi*[2]vow. There is no cause for shame at the wife being treated as the husband's property. Aren't the gods the greatest property that human beings possess? Unless man conceives the divine to be his own, how could he possibly know that they have divine properties in them? Hindu *shastras* have made the wife the husband's property with the intention of making her an object of reverence….

The English claim that in the pre-Christian era, the condition of women was particularly despicable and that Christianity was practically the first religion to place men and women on an equal footing. We feel that it is because they do not quite know the history of India that they propagate false claims about our religion in Europe as well as in India. If I have been able to correctly explain the spirit behind Hindu marriages, it will have to be admitted that well before the dawn of Christianity, the Hindus had elevated the woman to a position not found elsewhere….

Today it is common practice to marry boys ranging between the age of ten and 20; this may not have been the state in early India … unlike what prevails today, a marriage then may not have been child's play!! Instead, it was the most effective path to personal salvation. At that time, marriages would be held only after the man was sufficiently educated and conversant with prevalent social and cultural codes….

According to prescriptions of Manu, while the man had the freedom to marry late, the woman had to be married off early. Our *shastras* warn that a father incurred great sin if he failed to get his daughter married before she went into menses. The *shastras* do not explain why they chose to prescribe different rules for boys and girls, but it is not as though their recommendations are entirely unintelligible. There are several injunctions in our *shastras*,

which, at first sight, appear puzzling but will yield to close and patient scrutiny. Let me try and explain their intentions….

In England and in other countries of the West, domestic life is not organized along the lines it is in India. What we call an extended family (*ekannabarti parivar*) is entirely absent in India. In England a family comprises the husband and wife alone but here in India it includes parents, siblings, cousins, and relatives belonging both to the father's side and the mother's. In England, the wife is related only to the husband; in India she is tied to as many relationships as there are members in a given family. Where the wife has to functionally relate to a single person (the husband), her duties are not as diverse as they would be when a part of an extended family. She who is associated with the husband alone learns to carry out her various duties with relative ease; where she does not have this support, she is compelled to learn the hard way, guided mostly by family conventions. Now when a woman is married early and begins to learn of her duties and responsibilities from members of her husband's extended family, domestic skills can be easily acquired. On the other hand, if the woman was to enter her husband's household at a relatively extended age, such training would be hard to come by. A young woman in the prime of her youth is likely to develop such love and passion for the husband that then she begins to overlook her duties to other members of the family. There is one other matter. She who caters to the needs of the husband alone is likely to mold her character and personality in keeping with the husband's wishes. The wife who has to serve many people has to so adapt herself so as to win their affections. A young wife who is reasonably pretty and well mannered is bound to win over her husband with ease; when serving several people in the family, these qualities will not suffice. Under the circumstances, it is better if she were to be suitably groomed and trained by those whom she is expected to serve … it is almost certain that such considerations guided the Hindu *shastras* to recommend early marriages for girls….

If the man and woman are to be joined forever in carrying out routine domestic duties, it is desirable that the wife remain under the tutelage of the husband from an early age. Hence, the intention behind interrogating whether the age prescribed for Hindu marriages led to any undesirable results is really to ask if the union of man and woman is in itself good or bad. If two people have to perform the same work, they are better equipped to carry it out satisfactorily if a rapport and understanding develop between them. If one of them is less committed to work than the other, the work itself can never be satisfactorily performed and neither partner will be contented. Similarly, if marriage be the noblest objective in life, it is indeed desirable that the husband and wife share the same enthusiasm and commitment in everyday life….

Hindu *shastras* yoke the wife's existence to that of the husband and hence they regard the union of the man and woman to be permanent and inviolable.

This is not what the English believe in or practice. It is not as though they do not wish to strengthen the ties between the husband and wife but their greater concern is with honoring the independence of each and acknowledging the differences in ideals or interests between the two parties. Hence, they always allow for the ties of marriage to be loosened. The Hindu desires that any cause for disaffection between the husband and wife to be soon removed so that the bonding between them is further strengthened. The English, on the contrary, argue that while a couple may be happily married at a given time, there is always the possibility of distrust and disaffection returning between them, and therefore, it is important that law also provide for the dissolution of marriage if necessary … the Hindu prefers stability, the English disruption and dissolution. Self-gratification is the guiding spirit in English marriages and it is for that reason that the Englishman is always prepared to loosen the ties of marriage. On the other hand, it is because the underlying ideal in Hindu marriages is so lofty that the Hindu remains keen to strengthen these ties. Here we must pause to examine whether personal freedom ought to be assigned a higher place than some important ideals we must follow in life. If an individual enjoys unbridled freedom, it may so happen that he alone is happy and none else. If, on the other hand, an individual is prepared to give up that freedom with an eye on helping others, this will bring happiness all around….

The union of man and woman that comes forth in Hindu marriages is of a high order and socially useful. Those desiring to do good to the world should join each other in common aspirations and purpose. But this is possible through fully joining one heart to another. That explains, why according to our *shastras*, the ideal age for marriages in men ought to be higher than that of the woman.

Some might argue that this is an antiquated view of marriages and of no practical use in the present times. Why not, I ask. I have already explained why girls ought to be married off earlier for keeping the extended family system intact.

Such families exist in India even to this day and there is good reason, therefore, to encourage early marriage for girls. Also, I am not convinced by the argument that the Bengali's weak physique follows from premature marriages and conception. A young bride is not meant for those for whom marriage is merely a means of fulfilling crude bodily needs. Such a man is no more than a beast and a child-bride cannot be left to his care. Hence, if it be our wish to put a stop to our marriages from being abused, we must insist on getting the son thoroughly educated and getting married at a relatively advanced age. On the other hand, do not object to your daughter being married off early. Wickedness and malpractices cannot be effectively prevented through legal processes. The thief is repeatedly sent to prison and yet does not give up stealing. The wicked may be set on the right path only through

spiritual advancement in life. Today, our country is bereft of spiritual values and this, in turn, leads to an exemplary institution like early marriages being misinterpreted and misused….

Simply because some people are not religious cannot lead us to believe that religion is in itself bad even though this is what the English educated would like us to believe. After my paper on Hindu marriages was published, many people belonging to that class expressed their disagreement. They ridiculed me and made light of the objectives of Hindu marriages that I had enunciated … I need not take up all these objections in detail. However, Rabindra Babu,[3] writing in the journal *Bharati,*[4] had raised certain pertinent issues to which a rejoinder became necessary. Of the several objections raised by him, I summarize below only a few:

1. Thetrue objective underlying Hindu marriages is not spiritual but social, that is, to secure a progeny.
2. Marriages do not, therefore, lead to the spiritual union of the husband and wife
3. When compared to that of the husband, the status of the wife is inferior. This is borne out by Yudhistir's staking his wife, Draupadi, in a game of dice.
4. The real cause behind the poor physique of the Bengali is not the local environment but premature marriages. If the former had been the case, Bengal could not have been home to the Bengal tiger.

My rejoinder to Rabindra Babu's critique was published in *Nabajeeban*[5] and has been reproduced below for the benefit of interested readers.

II

According to the Hindu *shastras*, man's principal aim in life is to seek liberation. Here liberation means envisioning the blissful soul and the conquest of every weakness and temptation. Envisioning the soul amounts to experiencing the Great Soul (*paramatman*)….

Such experiences entail that the human soul be suitably prepared for the purpose. Freeing the soul follows from destroying the veil of illusion that surrounds it. The illusion originates in the material and insentient constitution of man. That man is driven by his senses and succumbs to all kinds of temptations clearly proves that he is not simply the soul but also a material body with its various material wants. Hence, the freeing of the soul requires effective suppression of our ordinary sense perception….

It is important to add alongside that to arrive at the state of liberation it is important to pass through the various stations of life as identified by our ancestors. Of these the householder's life (*grihastha*) is vitally important

because the duties and functions of the householder cannot be carried out without going through the institution of marriage and getting the wife to participate in the various ritual activities … from this it follows that the aims or objectives of Hindu marriage are spiritual, not social or material. Rabindra Babu argues that of the four stations in life known to our ancestors, only *vanaprastha*[6] may be taken to be spiritual since one enters it primarily for the sake of securing freedom of the soul. On the other hand, it is clearly established that accepting a wife through marriage also seeks the same … according to our *shastras,* all the four stations in human life are aimed at securing the same freedom. From his very birth the Hindu seeks liberation, directing his attention to the realization of *Brahman*, whether be at the stage of a celibate student (*brahmachari*) or the married householder … to this must be added the fact that in this world it is only the Hindu who relates the institution of marriage to securing spiritual objectives….

The man's soul can never be liberated without willing assistance from the wife. It is for this reason that among Hindus, the status of the wife is higher than accorded in Christianity, Islam, or Brahmoism.[7] The Hindu does not go by etiquette alone; he adheres to rules and conventions that have deeper meaning. For the sake of honoring the wife and woman, he is even willing to pay a price: the price that he pays is the irritating and unjust jabbering that he has to put up with all the time….

It might be argued that if the aim of Hindu marriage is the union of the husband and wife, how, then, does the Hindu male take multiple wives? This is not difficult to explain. First, common customs do not originate in scripture; they precede them in time. In the past, there were many reasons for men entering into multiple marriages. Over time as religious wisdom dawned on people, multiple marriages of women ceased but not those of men. That even polygamy is not in accordance with *shastras* has been amply proven by the late Pundit Vidyasagar in his well known tracts concerning the subject.[8] It is only under special circumstances that a man took a second wife. By citing the traditional expression "putrarthe kriyate varjya" Rabindra Babu claims that Hindu marriages simply aimed at increasing the population. He cleverly omits the verses that follow which are "putra pinda prayojana". In the Hindu convention, a wife is required for securing a male progeny on who falls the duty of paying obeisance to ancestors. This explains why only the first born son is deemed to be the true son; male children that follow are taken to be born of lust alone. Hence, the social system that allows a man to marry a second time is equally aimed at securing a progeny, not for fulfilling some material want. That system notwithstanding, many still prefer to adopt a son who, then, takes care of the pressing ritual need. Had Hindu political power not been destroyed so thoroughly, this provision would have encouraged more issueless parents to adopt sons, thereby circumventing polygamous marriages. I am also persuaded to argue along these lines because the

system of levirate (*niyoga*) has gone out of vogue as also the practice of a man marrying into a caste higher than his own (*pratiloma*) or lower than his own (*anuloma*).[9] The point essentially is that in an old culture, several complex social arrangements are at work not all of which are in accordance with accepted legal injunctions. These practices seem to have had a long life because they serve the specific interests of scholars and legalists who, then, took no initiative in removing them. It is reasonable to argue, therefore, that multiple marriages do not by themselves disprove the union of a particular man and a woman….

The objectives of a Hindu marriage are never to secure worldly needs alone but also those related to the world beyond (*paralaukik*). Our *shastras* claim that if the union of a man and a woman truly fulfills the goals of marriage in earthly life, the bonding between them cannot rupture even in the afterlife….

It emerges, therefore, that to fulfill the primary objectives of our life and to secure a true union between a couple, it is essential that an adult man marry a child bride. Even Rabindra Babu admits this in a roundabout fashion. He concedes that in an extended Hindu family, it is essential that the wife be young since she is expected to serve many people and because her duties are manifold. One may naturally ask why, given the typical requirements of an extended family, the wife alone must be of tender age and not the husband. The answer to this lies in the following: especially in relation to the husband, the wife has to be young since it is with him that she will be required to spend most of her time. It is Rabindra Babu's opinion that a girl bride would be very inappropriate for a family which is not an extended family since in such instances, there will be none to protect her or train her in household work. Admittedly, the extended family is fast breaking up. Why this has come to pass or whether the trend can be reversed are not issues that can be debated here meaningfully. Nonetheless, I do feel the urge to ask my critics if the parents of the groom too are not available at hand when the family is not an extended one….

Those of us who strongly disapprove of child marriages do this on the ground that such marriages do not allow men and women to exercise their choice of partners, especially when marriages so vitally determine human happiness or the lack of it[10]….

If marriage is no more than mating between a pair of birds or animals, it would indeed be preferable to do away with the institution altogether. In the community of Hindus, the husband and wife do not simply seek contentment in each other's company, do not look for faults in each other, and do not take their lives to be limited to themselves alone. On the contrary, they work toward serving others in the family and derive happiness on this account … it is thus that amidst a crisis situation and the lack of a proper Hindu education, even the common Hindu man and woman reveal a degree of mutual comfort and happiness that is not to be found even in the highest echelons of civilized English society[11]….

We now need to seriously examine whether or not physical weakness or disability among Hindus can be attributed to early marriages….

In the first place, whereas such marriages are common in northwestern provinces, the physique of people residing there is generally good. In sheer physical strength, they will match the European. Going by the inductive method of reasoning known to science, this exception alone will disprove the theory.

Second, the environment in Bengal is certainly far inferior to that found in the North West….

Third, in Bengal it is not just people who are weak but all forms of animal life … Rabindra Babu has challenged this conclusion by citing the case of the Bengal tiger, but in truth whereas the ecology in Bengal favors the tiger, it certainly does not favor other domesticated animals….

Fourth, there is a special reason for attributing the problem in Bengal to its poor environment. Even 20 or 30 years earlier, Bengal had not been so badly hit by the ravages of malaria … I am a witness to that era and have met people of that generation who can vouch for this. Just as a vessel rapidly loses its contents once the lid is taken off, the vigor and stamina of the Bengali race has been lost to malarial fever. How can anyone overlook this? Having witnessed for themselves, the ruin of our province those who still prefer to fight early marriages before they fight malaria are anything but true to themselves.

For the sake of argument, let us accept that if a woman conceives before she attains the right physiological age, she will suffer bodily and the child born to her will be weak and sickly too … these days, many women who are residents of Calcutta and its neighborhood are seen to suffer from frail health before they are even 20 or 30 years of age. There are many reasons for this. In cities like Calcutta, women are quite averse to physical work; they are extremely reluctant to carry out routine work like cooking, upkeep of the house, etc. Such work that they ought to perform themselves they get done by engaging domestic help. They now prefer to spend time in dressing, reading novels and plays, simply gossiping, or playing cards. For this reason they have turned extremely vulnerable to a variety of diseases which keeps the entire family on its toes. Infants who are breastfed by these women have also turned sickly and weak. And yet, they continue to give birth to children year after year; soon after they have left the maternity chamber, they enter it once again….

Cohabiting with a woman is fraught with many risks. Unless this is carried out with caution and with adequate self-restraint, the fruits of unmitigated passion are likely to be extremely unpleasant. Our law givers such as Manu have therefore wisely laid down rules about keeping the company of women. We now fancy ourselves as civilized and hence take to mocking older practices as barbaric….

From this we may conclude that physical acts like copulating with a woman are never free of problems, even when subject to rules of physiology. Such rules prove ineffective unless governed by social and spiritual considerations. Such an arrangement was indeed with us previously. In the past, a child would be exposed to moral and religious instruction from a very early age, and discipline enforced by family conventions would ensure that children learn some self-control, which would then help character formation … all of these are now lacking; when parents themselves are self-willed, how could they possibly keep their children under check? Owing to the decline in our education, religious values, and family discipline, children no longer obey parents; they simply behave as they wish to. Enhancing the age of marriage will only increase these tendencies….

It is not the world that we must give up but worldliness. The world is not boundless and hence, by persisting with our worldly pursuits we are bound to be in trouble some day as will Europe and America. Are not the signs clear enough even now? What else is Socialism, Communism, or demonstrations of the unemployed? It is therefore my plea that we go back to our ancient ideals of *brahmacharya*. It is specious reasoning to say that all modern-day changes ought to be accepted as part of a historical process … once we obtain the status of a self-conquering *brahmachari*, our material needs will lessen too … to stay away from marriage or to defer it is not the right solution. The wise among the English don't discourage the poor from marrying; they try to ensure that they don't squander their money in drinking….

A *brahmachari* is not the homeless, naked ascetic with ashes smeared over his body and living the life of a recluse. On the contrary, it indicates a man who has the power of self-control, a man opposed to a life of indulgence and luxury, a man following the call of righteous duty and committed to social good. For this we shall have to earn more, but even if we fail to do so, we are not condemned to end our days with a broken heart or fight among ourselves as do dogs, jackals, and Europeans. In the present times, we have failed in augmenting our income mainly because we have unwittingly taken to the indulgent life of a Babu[12] which eventually lands us in perpetual debt. This inhibits the generation of wealth and capital growth….

If for some reason, a man is forced to marry when past 30 or 35, should he still marry a girl of 12 or 13? Of course he should, just how will he find a girl older in age? One could justly say that will leave a huge difference in age between partners but there is simply no solution to this. Wherever we depart from established practice, there is a price that we have to pay. And such a difference of age may occur even in cases where the man and woman themselves agree to be partners in marriage. Hence among Europeans you will often find a groom of 30 years married to a woman twice his age or a 20 year old woman married to a man 65 years of age. Such bizarre exceptions can occur everywhere[13]….

Notes

1 Author's Note: Longman's *Fourth Reader*. Lesson 18, p. 71. Sadly, in our own schools, little boys are being imparted such advice!
Editor's Note: The above book was simultaneously published from London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta by Longman Green and Co.
2 Editor's Note: Literally, walking seven steps. This is an important ritual act comprising the Hindu marriage ceremony. The bride and the groom are made to go around the sacred fire (with the groom leading the bride) and pledge marriage vows.
3 Editor's Note: The reference here is to the poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941).
4 Editor's Note: A prominent literary journal founded in 1877 by members of the Tagore family. Tagore himself served as its editor for a time. Tagore's essay also titled *Hindu Vivaha* was published in *Bharati O Balak* of Aswin 1294 BS (September–October 1887).
5 Editor's Note: A short-lived Bengali journal founded in 1884 by the conservative Bengali thinker and literary critic, Akshay Chandra Sarkar (1846–1917).
6 Editor's Note: The third of the fourfold Hindu stages in life known in early India is marked by detachment and renunciation from worldly acts.
7 Editor's Note: It is interesting that Basu should consider Brahmoism/Brahmodharma to be a separate religion. This was generally atypical of the conservative Hindu who objected to certain social practices of the Brahmos, not so much religious doctrines and practices. The oldest and the more conservative wing of the Brahmo Samaj known as the Adi Brahmo Samaj insisted on their being called Hindus.
8 Editor's Note: See, for instance, his tract "*Bahubibaha Rahit howa Uchit kina*" (Should Polygamy be stopped?), published in two parts in 1871.
9 Editor's Note: A system whereby the validity or legality of marriages was determined with an eye on the castes of the parties concerned. *Pratiloma*, where a man married a woman of a higher caste, was shunned for it clearly violated patriarchy. *Anuloma* was condoned more frequently and treated as a social contingency.
10 Author's Note: The *Sanjivani* of 29th Sravan, 1294 BS (August, 1887) observed: "When parents do not enjoy unlimited rights over their children's material well being, we fail to understand how something that is more valuable, the power to regulate their happiness, can be left to them".
Editor's Note: The *Sanjivani* was a Bengali paper run by the more liberal branch of the Brahmo Samaj, known as the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj. It was launched by the veteran journalist, Krishna Kumar Mitra (1852–1936) in 1883.
11 Author's Note: "After close observation during six years devoted especially to the study of social phenomenon in the West, I have come to the conclusion that the proportion of unhappy marriages in England and America is due to the very conception of marriage as an institution of attaining personal happiness and not as a means of serving family and society, of making others happy besides the couple themselves. Personal gratification is an utterly unsafe thing to be trusted, even in the accomplishing of that which is its avowed object, namely, happiness". The Speeches of an eminent Indian gentleman on "Hindu Marriage Customs" delivered at the meeting held on the 6 August 1887, at the Sovabazar Rajbari.
Editor's Note: Reports of this meeting appeared in the contemporary Bengali press though for lack of supporting evidence it is difficult to determine the identity of the speaker. The meeting was inspired by the agitation against infant marriages started in Bombay by the Parsi social reformer, Behramji M. Malabari (1853–1912).

12 Editor's Note: A term somewhat disparagingly used by Europeans for the urbanized Bengali Hindus, especially those in petty clerical employment. However, the term when used in the Bengali language was a mark of gentility and social respect. On this level, the term could cut across vocations.
13 Editor's Note: Such differences in age were not unknown to upper caste Bengali society. The feminist and Brahmo reformer, Dwarkanath Ganguly (1844–1898) married Kadambini Ganguly when their ages were 39 and 22, respectively.

14

SHAKUNTALATATTVA

A Critique of Kalidas's *Abhigyanshakuntala*

*Durvasa's inflicting the curse on Shakuntala is the most important episode in the tale named after its lead female character. It was this that turned a tale into a fine dramatic work. But for this, Kalidas's work would have remained a mere tale. Needless to say, not all tales acquire a dramatic quality … In the Arabian Tales (*Arabya Upakhyan*), there are over a thousand stories, but it is still not a dramatic work. Only that which aims at revealing the core human character may be classified as a truly dramatic work. Human character is of two kinds: one of these allows itself to be controlled by the world outside us; the other keeps this world itself under its control….

Think of the day Dronacharya assumed the post of the Commander-in-Chief of the Kaurava army at the great battlefield of Kurukshetra. The Pandava army feared annihilation at his hands and desperately tried to think of a ruse that might avert this. Suddenly there arose the rumor that Aswathama, the Acharya's son, had been slain in battle. Upon hearing this Dronacharya despaired and lost all interest in continuing to fight the war. But he was also seized with some doubt and wondered if such a fate had indeed befallen his valiant son. It was thus that he turned to Yudhistira, the very embodiment of truthfulness and righteous conduct, who was never known

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: Shakuntalatattwa. Calcutta. Canning Library. 1881: 1–118. Originally serialized in the journal Bangadarshan. Basu states that he based his work on a manuscript copy of the Mahabharata obtained in the NWP and the Bengali version prepared under the patronage of Pundit Iswarchandra Vidyasagar (1820–1891) and Kaliprasanna Singha (1840–1871). In this task he was assisted by Hemchandra Bhattacharya Vidyaratna (1872–1906), the first scholar to translate Valmiki Ramayana into Bengali and one Tarakumar Chakravarti. The work was dedicated to Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay.

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to lie. However, given the circumstances, even Yudhistira made an exception and misled Dronacharya into thinking that his son had indeed been killed on the battlefield. At this heartbreaking news, Dronacharya dropped all his weapons and refused to fight any further. What deplorable moral fall that was for Yudhistira! The man who had never forsaken truth, not even in the face of the greatest adversity or temptation, now disowned the truth only for the sake of gaining back his kingdom which success in the battle would have made possible. This we may take as an apt example of a man who had let himself to be controlled by powers lying outside him; this was virtually his death at the hands of such powers … If, on the contrary, overcoming his desire to win back his kingdom OR overlooking the indignity and humiliation that the Kauravas had caused his wife, he had stuck to the truth the eldest of the Pandava brothers would have remained what he had always been, even in the face of the greatest personal challenges. That would have turned him into a character befitting a dramatic work of high quality….

Though this work of Kalidas is named after its principal female character, Shakuntala, in our opinion, it is strongly oriented toward the strong and heroic male character. King Dushyanta is its chief protagonist….

Kalidas has characterized Dushyanta as a man strongly under the control of his sense perceptions. At the same time, he has also depicted the king as possessing an ideal bodily frame and commitment to righteous action commensurate with his physical prowess….

Dushyanta was a king, a particularly distinguished king belonging to the famed lunar dynasty (*chandrabangshiya*) who ruled over India (*Bharata*). He was the sole proprietor of all the splendid riches yielded by that land. He could lay claim to every known article of enjoyment if only he so wished. In truth, however, he was opposed to an indulgent life. His life was modeled on the heroic; ignoring all bodily comfort he could wander about, a bow in hand, even in the scorching sun….

But it was this very man, possessed of ample courage and bodily vigor who succumbed to the temptations of the flesh upon sighting Shakuntala. Having seen her, he kept wondering if he would ever be able to win her for himself. In such thoughts, he would spend many sleepless nights….

Dear Reader, try recalling the third act of Kalidas's play. Shakuntala continues to burn with intense desire for Dushyanta, wondering if it was at all worth living without him. Dushyanta too can be found to be suffering from a similar anxiety. Eventually, as we very well know, these characters, so deeply enamored of one another, were united….

As things turned out, the union was soon cut short. Fearing that her parents might suddenly arrive on the spot and be surprised by the lovers, Shakuntala hastily moved elsewhere and Dushyanta's amorous thoughts were ruptured by piteous cries of the sages of the hermitage under attack by ghouls (*rakshasas*). Upon hearing the sages cry out for help, Dushyanta

promptly prepared to fight the invading *rakshasas;* it seemed as though he had never heard of Shakuntala, far less seen her! What an extraordinary man was Dushyanta! If only we paused to reflect on this event the great depth of the man's character will be apparent to us. We shall then understand how a sense of commitment to righteous duty was the defining quality in the man….

Dushyanta could sense that Shakuntala desired him intensely. But rather than be elated, he began to seriously mull over his experiences. Perhaps he wondered if, as the daughter of the revered sage Kanva and a Brahmin by birth, Shakuntala could at all unite with him who neither belonged to the hermitage community nor was he a Brahmin by birth.[1] As desire kindled his thoughts, Dushyanta turned to reflect upon the finer points of dharma, on his duties as a man and as a king. Had his moral strength or self-restraint been any weaker, it is quite likely that pure passion would have driven Dushyanta to commit an improper act … eventually, however, his mind was set at rest upon hearing that the sage Kanva had given his consent to the union….

At the time, regardless of whether or not Dushyanta had truly fathomed Shakuntala's feelings for him, he claimed no rights over her. Hence, there was simply no way in which he could have got Shakuntala to act the way he thought fit. No doubt his mind continued to be rocked by huge surges of emotion but Dushyanta was a virtuous man in every respect, a man of noble thoughts and the very embodiment of righteousness. Though swayed by intense desire, Dushyanta overpowered them completely. His passions were aroused but soon extinguished by the finer qualities of mind and heart….

As Dushyanta prepared to mount his chariot in pursuit of the threatening *rakshasas,* there arrived word from his mother. She wanted him back home for a special purpose. Dushyanta was naturally in a predicament. After all, the sages who counted on his help were just as worthy of respect as the mother; an appeal from either could not be brushed aside. In the end, he managed to persuade Madhavya, the messenger who had brought word from his mother, to take his place. He knew this to be possible since the Queen Mother treated Madhavya as affectionately as she would have treated her own son. This episode only demonstrates how skillfully the dramatist Kalidas resolved a dilemma that had arisen within the plot. This was also his way of affirming how Dushyanta attached an equal importance to his duties as a son and as a king….

We now enter the latter half of the play when Dushyanta has returned to his kingdom and Shakuntala is cursed by Durvasa for neglecting her duties as a host. This latter half can be broadly divided into two parts. The first stretches from the time Durvasa cursed Shakuntala to the time the royal ring was recovered; the second from the recovery of the ring to the reunion of Dushyanta and Shakuntala….

The reader may recall Durvasa's prophecy that it was only upon sighting the ring that he had gifted Shakuntala as a token of their love and marriage,

would Dushyanta fully recall her past. Shakuntala, as we know, had lost the ring while bathing in a river but did not realize this at the time. This act of carelessness has a special meaning which we shall discuss later. Unmindful of her loss, she boldly approached the king in all her bewitchingly beautiful form. This was the beauty that had once mesmerized Dushyanta … why then did the king spurn Shakuntala and the claims she made upon him as his wife?….

Upon being so curtly rejected, Shakuntala, the very embodiment of grace and gentleness, began to spew venom, like a serpent trampled underfoot. At this point, Sharangarva, the young sage who had accompanied Shakuntala on the journey to the king's court, also lost his temper and began to curse the king in the most vitriolic manner….

Are we to understand that Dushyanta had lost all respect for the wise sages of the hermitage who had bid farewell to Shakuntala so that she might reunite with her husband? Was he not the same man? That is not quite the case. As Dushyanta saw it at the time, the wise sages themselves were pushing him towards committing a wrongful act: they were trying to coax him into accepting as his wife, a woman of whom he had no recollection. Dushyanta, who lived by the dictates of dharma, knew that when it came to upholding dharma, even the greatest fears or temptation had to be overcome, be it irresistible feminine beauty or the curses of an offended and angry sage….

That ended the first challenge for Dushyanta … no worldly temptation could defeat his mental powers and resolve. Dushyanta clearly overcame the world outside him. But this also amounts to victory for our playwright. Kalidas was a Brahmin and that enabled him to demonstrate how the laws of dharma stood above even sages and holy men. Kalidas, you are a Brahmin, not simply for India but of the entire world!

Once the lost ring was shown to him, memories came rushing back to King Dushyanta. Now began the second challenge for him, and this too was no ordinary challenge. Once he was able to recall his past, his mind was filled with remorse at the way he had mistreated his wife … his worries now began to take a heavy toll on his mind and body. His radiant face lost its glow, his bright eyes lost their penetrating shine….

And yet, such grave pain and sorrow notwithstanding, Dushyanta never took his mind off his duties as a king … when asked to give a ruling on some pressing problem, he approached his task with due dignity and seriousness. Having duly examined the particulars regarding a case, he would point to errors committed by his chief minister and resolve the case in keeping with requirements of law. A case related to the recovery of an issueless merchant's property moved him especially for he too was without a son. Respecting conventions as he always did, Dushyanta despaired, wondering just how his ancestors would suffer for lack of a male descendant. At this thought, he

swooned and fell to the ground in a state of agony. That manly body, strong and large s that of an elephant, which had not yielded to the anguish caused by his separation from Shakuntala, could not bear this acute anxiety….

In any dramatic work of high quality, there are two important elements at work. One of these is directly cognizable (*pratyakshya*) to the eye; by browsing through the play, one may understand its story line reasonably well. The other element is not so cognizable and even on reading through an entire work, this element may not be fully revealed. To get to this particular element, one has to enter its very depths….

In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* we find Prince Hamlet's mind seized with hate against the man who had murdered his father, and yet he remained undecided on whether to avenge his father's killing. The play is characterized by this paradox from beginning to the end. This is the dramatic element in its directness, quite evident to anyone who reads the play. But hidden behind this paradox lies another paradox which is rooted in the human mind. That property of the human mind which produces this apparent conflict between intention and action represents the second kind of dramatic element, not directly perceptible….

We must now pause to consider the substance of what we have said about Dushyanta. When drawn to an extraordinarly woman, Dushyanta was put to a severe test. But what kind of test was this? Was it a test of his romantic love? Perhaps some of us will agree to that. Some others might venture to say that here the dramatist wanted to establish the purity and innocence inherent in that love just so that the reader will not disapprovingly refer to an innocent young hermit girl being seduced by a royal figure. The first response to such criticism would be that a first-rate dramatist like Kalidas does not establish his work on love that is lecherous and impure. Second, from the fact that Dushyanta long debated in his mind whether or not to consort with a Brahmin girl, it may be inferred that he had no dishonorable intentions. Third, Dushyanta did, after all, marry Shakuntala in the *gandharva*[2] way and gifted her a ring as a token of their marriage. Fourth, judging by the way the play has depicted Dushyanta as a well-mannered, honest man of noble bearing, the purity and solemnity of the marriage does not require any further corroboration.

What, then, was the test that Dushyanta was put through? This is a serious question and hence requires to be dealt at some length. From the moment he sighted her, Dushyanta had developed feelings of romantic love for Shakuntala. From that moment the man was subjected to two contrary pulls of private passion and the call of duty. But what exactly is love? This is but the expression of feeling associated with the heart under some duress. Love is a base (*tamasic*) feeling or pure passion. We all know how knowledge and sentiment are mutually opposed to each other. Once he fell in love with Shakuntala, Dushyanta pondered over the obstacles that might come in

the way of realizing his love. The characters in Shakespeare's plays are not known to similarly reflect on their deeds, to control their passions with the aid of knowledge. With Kalidas, the characters are always under the control of knowledge, even in the domain of private feeling. From this it may be concluded that whereas in Shakespeare, there is nothing opposed to the expression of feeling or sentiment, in Kalidas we find both the controlling power of knowledge and the rules of righteous conduct based on such knowledge….

We can now be in a position to say that it was not Dushyanta's love that was tested but his virtuous knowledge and good intentions for others… what, then, was the conflict in Dushyanta's mind born of? We are inclined to think that this was a mental conflict induced by the contrary pulls of self-gratification and obligations to the community. The conflict in Romeo's mind was caused by the arch rivalry between the two families, which clearly has to do with the ways of the world … in Dushyanta's case only a part of the mind was ruled by unbridled carnal passion; the rest was remarkably free of this … in Dushyanta, a concern for the larger community, outside the self, was the dominant quality and whenever there was a conflict between the self and the other, the latter emerged victorious.

If we examine the history of the world, we shall find human beings existing on two planes of existence. One of these is related to feelings or moods; the other to knowledge or reason. When trying to determine social duties or public conduct, some people prefer to go by social prescriptions rather than one's private judgment while others tend to do the opposite. Following social conventions is a way of respecting the past. In India, this is common practice; here, the Brahmin's word has ruled our everyday social life. Only two or three hundred years back, Europe had preferred to go India's way; in everyday life Europeans were guided by social and religious prescriptions laid down by Roman Catholic priests. Even today, more than half of Europe continues to follow these. How may we account for this? We think that this brings out the natural slovenliness in human character, the lack of a spirit of interrogation and weak will power. Another reason appears to be the tendency to uncritically accept that which has been held to be superior nature for a long time. Over the years, this only turns into unquestioning obedience….

Some among us, as we have previously argued, resort to the use of rational analysis in determining codes of social and moral conduct. They reveal no blind reverence for older thoughts or practices; on the contrary, they strongly shun that which is irrational. This too is a natural inclination in man. It is this that caused the Protestant Revolution in Europe and in India, the social reformation begun by the Buddha. However, it is extremely important that the two perspectives come together … history teaches us that mankind has always progressed along lines of reconciling the two … in Dushyanta one finds the harmony of the two perspectives but in his case, the conflict caused

by the collision of the two has no sense of harshness and acrimony about it; it produces no spark setting alight our community life. It must be noted though that such violent eruptions cannot always be ruled out as has been amply demonstrated by the revolution that occurred in England in 1688 … In the present times, the social philosophy of Comte is the prime example of this consummate harmony and reconciliation. Dushyanta is symbolic of this profound historical law. He represents both the past and future; he is the poetic realization of the historical destiny that awaits humanity.[3] I doubt if there is a comparable character in all of the world's dramatic literature….

In India, a heroic woman is easy to sight. She who hitherto has never been sufficiently exposed to nature and bearing a delicate bodily frame now boldly and briskly marches to Puri, to Gaya, Kashi, Kamrup, and Rameswar. How are we to explain this mystery? From this we may justly deduce the following: the man is bodily powerful, the woman powerful only when driven by emotions. On the worldly plane, the man is to be found where all the action is; the woman rarely. Activity and movement are natural to men; the woman turns active only under exceptional circumstances. However, when this occurs, the woman cannot be told apart from the man … it is because the woman is the source of this mutually opposed character that she comes to be counted among the great mysteries of the world.

The qualities that make Shakuntala strong are also the source of her frailty and weakness; the clarity with which Kalidas reveals this truth to us is astounding … unlike Portia, Rosalind, or Isabella, Shakuntala was not a particularly gifted woman. At first glance, she would strike one as possessing only common intelligence. Unlike Portia, she was not argumentative or an expert on moral law as Isabella was. Also, given her age and social environment, it would have been unnatural to expect such qualities. We feel that Kalidas purposefully intended to portray Shakuntala as an ordinary woman, guided primarily by the instincts of her heart. Admittedly, among women too, we may come across some who are very knowledgeable and learned, but that is more an exception than the rule. If a woman's objective was to gain wisdom and knowledge, it is very likely that she would be forced to give up her identity and natural qualities as a woman….

The intelligence that Shakuntala possessed is not the kind associated with men. The mind of a man goes by analytical reasoning; Shakuntala never exhibited such traits. In an intensely private moment when Dushyanta attempted to hold Shakuntala by the hand, she promptly told him that without the consent of her elders, she would never submit to his passionate advances. Now Dushyanta, who went by reasoning, tried to convince her that she might easily give in to his wishes without the elders getting wind of this, but Shakuntala made no attempt to counter this with some sharp or reasoned argument of her own; she simply tried to dissuade him in the name of social propriety. Those of us who have read the *Abhigyanshakuntala* will

know that whereas Dushyanta's arguments were improper from the point of view of public morality, Shakuntala's were not. What is the mystery that lies behind this? This episode simply affirms that while Dushyanta had judged the matter from the perspective of reason and probability, Shakuntala acted in a manner befitting a righteous woman honoring social conventions….

A thorough analysis of Kalidas's work enables us to arrive at the following conclusions:

1. The man is stronger in the body; a woman's body, by comparison, is soft and delicate.
2. The man has greater powers of physical endurance; the woman's endurance is more mental in nature and is located in the heart.
3. Work and activity are natural to man; the woman enters this domain only when driven by her instincts.
4. The man is superior in knowledge and in bodily strength compared to the woman; the woman excels in the qualities of the heart. The man's character is expansive and acquires several qualities through worldly experience; the woman has greater depth of character. The man relates less closely to the external world than does the woman.
5. The woman's spiritual character is greater than that of man. But whereas the man's spirituality is mostly free and unencumbered, that identified with the woman is greatly determined by everyday experiences in the material world.
6. A man's intelligence springs from rational judgment; in the woman, it is but the expression of emotion and instincts.
7. The woman is a bundle of opposites: soft yet firm; weak yet strong; lethargic and yet capable of dynamism; emotional yet capable of reasoned argument; spiritual yet engrossed in materiality. In this world, there is no greater mystery than the woman….

From a close reading of Kalidas's play, we know that the union of Dushyanta and Shakuntala produced three misfortunes: the misfortune that affected them personally, that affecting their guardians and close relatives, and finally, the misfortune that struck the Bharata Empire itself. The action mainly involved just two people, but the consequences following the action touched the lives of many … the truth embedded in these occurrences which Kalidas could communicate with greater felicity than Shakespeare is the following: marriage between two people does not affect the lives of the married couple alone; it has a bearing on the fate of the entire community. This is the first lesson that the *Abhigyanshakuntala* teaches us.

We also know that her amorous thoughts concerning Dushyanta led Shakuntala to neglect her duties toward revered guests which, then, caused her to be cursed. What does this suggest to us? It suggests that regardless of

how high or pure our personal feelings may be, they cannot come in the way of meeting our duties and obligations ... it also suggests that the purest of feelings could turn impure in the event of neglecting or overlooking accepted social conventions ... this is the second lesson that Kalidas's work teaches us. It is a work that may be justly called "instructive"....

Let us recall the tragic incident, when, failing to produce the royal ring before the king and thereby establish her claims as his wedded wife, Shakuntala had to put up with some abuse and ridicule. Now had there been some other evidence testifying to the marriage between Dushyanta and Shakuntala, none of the tragic incidents that followed would have occurred ... if indeed there had been some such evidence, even the curse of Durvasa would have failed to take effect. As matters turned out, there was no other corroborative evidence for the marriage since it was solemnized in secret. Why did the king resort to this stealth? The answer to this lies in the irrepressible sexual urge which is also the reason behind Durvasa's curse and the unpleasant incidents that followed ... From this it follows that good and honorable intentions by themselves do not effectively solemnize a marriage. A marriage is not simply the journey undertaken by two hearts; it has the power and potential to produce a measure of both social happiness and unhappiness. Hence, every marriage has to be solemnized with the support and consent of the community ... the community itself is the true source of an improved conjugal life. It is with the approval of the community and for the general good that a couple ought to be united in marriage. Dushyanta sinned in not following this convention and thereby brought disaster upon himself. This is the third lesson behind *Abhigyanshakuntala*....

The tale of Romeo and Juliet saddens us and we develop some empathy for the tragic lovers. By comparison, Dushyanta's fate makes us reflect on the future of the entire mankind. In Romeo we find little apart from romantic love and maddening passion. This leads us to wonder if, with the aid of some other mental quality, even a man blinded by passion could escape worldly misery and pain. Dushyanta's instance worries us more since his fortitude and great mental strength notwithstanding, the man failed to avert his misfortunes....

Auguste Comte says that other than hunger, the most powerful human instinct is that of sexuality. But this is not the mental and historical truth found in the tale of Romeo and Juliet; on the contrary, this is amply borne out in the *Abhigyanshakuntala* which is but the visual representation of this generic truth. This is the fourth lesson that we can draw from the play.

We have now covered most of the territory, but there is still something else to be said. Judging by the way Kalidas has characterized both Dushyanta and Shakuntala, it is amply clear that these characters from the play represent *Purusha* and *Prakriti*[4] respectively. Here *Purusha* represents the finer but

immutable qualities that make up the building blocks of the world (*upadan*) and *Prakriti*, the gross and ever-changing elements. The defining feature of Dushyanta is knowledge and there is a certain quality in him which does not change under any circumstances … we do not, however, find comparable qualities in Shakuntala. She assumes different moods under different circumstances. Further, when under varying conditions, we do not find her adhering to any one form … whereas Shakuntala's mind leans on the concrete, that of Dushyanta is closer to the abstract. Shakuntala's mind and heart are determined by the material world; Dushyanta represents its very opposite….

The play *Kumarsambhava* reveals to us Kalidas's penchant for Samkhya philosophy and indeed the play depicts the spiritual union of the *Purusha* and *Prakriti* of Samkhya….

This leads me to believe that this is exactly what the *Abhigyanshakuntala* also argues. However, there remains an important difference between the two. In *Kumarsambhava* (also the work of Kalidas), the union of *Purusha* and *Prakriti* is a spiritual union; in the *Abhigyanshakuntala*, the locus is the social world. It is on account of this difference that in the *Kumarsambhava*, Madan[5] was burned down to ashes; in the *Abhigyanshakuntala,* he clearly emerged victorious at the end. The underlying message that is being conveyed here is that in the pursuit of spiritual life, *Prakriti* has to be first vanquished and overcome yet with regard to everyday life in the world. Her powers and functions have to be acknowledged. The spiritual world is ruled by *Purusha* and the social by *Prakriti* … further, by introducing other female characters into the play like Basumati and Hamsapadika, who are wives to Dushyanta, Kalidas seeks to prove that it is not Shakuntala alone that troubles the king but also other women in his life. On a closer scrutiny of the world and of life within it, we are bound to conclude that all men are likely to be troubled by women as was King Dushyanta. This is the fifth lesson that the *Abhigyanshakuntala* teaches us.

However, if the union of man and woman invariably underlies the act of creation, how are we to overcome the malefic influences that are potentially present in the union? Our poet and dramatist has given us the answer to this as well … Dushyanta's tale demonstrates the truth that our mental powers and sense perceptions are independent of each other. Indeed, there is no certainty about our mental powers being able to effectively subdue our senses. Hence, if it is our intention to keep our sense perceptions under control, relying on our mental powers alone may not suffice in every case. It is therefore desirable that social controls be brought into play alongside self-restraint and discretion….

Shakuntala's story teaches how in marriages romantic love and a personal choice of partners are best avoided. Through the instances of the queens Basumati and Hamsapadika, it also reveals to us the dangers inherent in

polygamy. *Abhigyanshakuntala* is a grand epic on the judicious joining of private passions to institutions of social control. This is the final lesson that the play has to offer….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Though Dushyanta was not aware of this, Shakuntala was actually the daughter of sage Visvamitra and the Apsara (nymph) Menaka. This gives her the status of a Kshatriya and hence a match for King Dushyanta. Did Kalidas intend to highlight Dushyanta as a man respectful of social conventions by making him reflect on these considerations? Basu certainly saw this as adding to the King's virtuous character.
2 Editor's Note: One of the eight forms of marriage acknowledged in early Hindu tradition in which marriage was based primarily on the mutual consent of two adult partners. Implicit in this is the violation of matrimonial norms related to caste, age and social status and dispensing with the traditional methods of selecting a suitable bride or groom.
3 Author's Note: Admittedly, in early India, there was no discernible effort to historically analyze or determine human character. However, that is of little consequence. He who understands the social face of an individual can easily use it for historical analysis. In the event of that happening, there can be nothing wrong in explaining an individual's opinion by employing the historical method.
4 Editor's Note: The two metaphysical principles in the Samkhya school of Hindu philosophy deeply influenced other philosophical schools within Hinduism and Hindu theology.
5 Editor's Note: The Indian equivalent of Cupid found in classical Sanskrit literature.

15

SAVITRITATTVA

Savitri's Tale

*In our Puranas there are many tales of various men and women. These tales have not been written in the manner known to English or other European languages. This is not the right place to enumerate the several differences palpable between Puranic tales and European life histories. Suffice to mention only a few that are sharp and significant. In both cases we find details pertaining to birth but not narrated in the same way. In European life histories are included details pertaining to place of birth, the year, the day of the week etc. These are considered vital … such details are conspicuously absent in Puranic accounts. It is not as though the Puranas are oblivious to such details. Had such details carried any significance for Puranic authors, they would have been surely included. Puranic accounts of birth, for instance, offer information of a different kind. They tell us if a child has been born at an auspicious hour and whether or not the newborn carries on its body any signs representing good luck or misfortune….

European life histories never carry such details. They do not pause to consider whether the newborn will turn out to be a good soul; perhaps they consider such matters to be useless and of no practical value. The attempt to determine the inner nature of the person at birth is a practice distinctive to Hindus alone. Such differences in practice occur due to a number of reasons, all of which we cannot discuss here at any length. Here I shall discuss only two. The Hindus believe in both karma and transmigration of the soul. The consequences resulting from our actions that we carry across past lives are visible at the time of birth. Whereas the European's first concern is with the

* Chandranath Basu: *Savitritattva*. Calcutta. Gurudas Chattopadhyay. 1900: 1–215.

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physical body, the Hindu focuses on the intrinsic nature or temperament of a person.

In Puranic tales, there is yet another kind of information not available elsewhere. This has to do with the time immediately preceding a person's birth. Savitri's tale is not the only one which narrates the arduous vows and rites that parents undertake in order to be blessed with a child. These appear abundantly in Puranic literature … those who perform these rites firmly believe that performing these rites sufficiently pleases the gods. That which is difficult to realize through action is easily obtained through the mind, enriched by forbearance, resoluteness, and noble thoughts. After King Asvapati observed the most challenging of vows and penances for 18 years with devotion and steadfastness, the Goddess Savitri, pleased with his sincerity and devotion, appeared before him and granted him a boon. When the king prayed that he be blessed with a son, the Goddess assured him that a spirited and energetic daughter will be born to him by the Lord Brahma's wishes (this daughter was also named Savitri)….

In times gone by many married couples would similarly wish that a child be born to them. Though anxious to secure a male descendant, they would not accept a son who was wicked or incompetent. Only such a child who was free of illness was strong and noble minded; be it a son or daughter, they would consider worthy of true descendant[1]….

It would appear as though many kings, failing to father a child in their youth, turned to ritual observances, undertook special vows and rituals so that they might acquire adequate mental and physical strength to impregnate their wives … in the *Mahabharata* Vedvyas has described in detail the several vows and observances that Asvapati had undertaken before Savitri was born to him. None else other than the authors of the Puranas have revealed such matters in comparable detail. There is a particular reason for doing that. None but the Hindu knows that only if a child is begotten as a part of fulfilling one's moral and spiritual obligation in the world does it turn out to be strong and righteous. I do not know if in Europe, the process of giving birth to a child implies a suitable joining of the body and mind. Perhaps their concern is only with the body and even physical power is not put to good use. This is because in their case, the mind which brings about refinement remains detached from the body itself. What follows from this is an increase in the number of strong bodied bullies, not people who are God fearing and prefer leading a pious life … Europe makes no attempt to ensure that the new born child develops both moral and bodily strength. If only Europeans were to carry out certain rites at child birth, this would produce much good for them….

Now let us turn to the case of the modern Bengali. This is of utmost importance. The tale of Savitri is the tale of our Puranas, of our holy books, and of our revered ancestors. But such matters we now treat with indifference

and disdain; we seem to find manliness in ignoring them! Our observance of celibacy, self-control, and moderation has now touched a new low, lower than that found in other communities … Bengal is already cursed by a foul environment. That apart, malaria has raged in the countryside for the last 50 years, taking a heavy toll of our population. Under these conditions if we continue to disregard all kinds of self-control, whether these be related to religion, society, or family, what else can we be expected to do but produce a progeny that is weak and lowly like common worms? This situation needs to be remedied soon. Some of us are now heard to say that if one were to make adult marriages the norm we shall considerably gain in physical vigor and strength. We do not support this view. A race which by nature is given to excesses will continue to beget weak and deformed children regardless of the age of marriage….

Those who recommend changes in our marriage customs do so with an eye on European social norms. In Europe, people tend to attach greater importance to physical strength and vigor and hence prefer to marry late in life … any changes to our marriage customs are likely to produce more harm than good. If at all we desire healthy children, we must follow the methods adopted by Asvapati. Once successfully adopted, these will also ensure that our family size is kept within manageable limits … the steady increase in human population has already placed the world under great duress and the problem can only get worse with time. Having failed to resolve this problem, European scholars are beginning to view wars, famines, and epidemics, all of which drastically reduce the human population as acts benefiting humanity! There can be nothing more regrettable or shameful than this. As the growth of the human population shows no signs of abating, Europeans have now started devising several ways of birth control, some of which are truly despicable in nature….

It is quite possible that some would come up with the argument that while it may be good to exercise self-control in order to beget good and healthy children, human reproduction need not be interpreted as an act that yields religious merit. On close reflection, it will be clear that the association one makes between the birth of a child and a life of austerity and self-disciplining in parents is meaningless or a matter to be held trivial. A true Hindu ought to know that he has certain social and ritual obligations to fulfill in life. One of these is to redeem debts that he owes to his ancestors. A progeny ensures that ancestors are ritually offered food and water at propitious times….

Having narrated the story of Savitri's birth, the author of the *Mahabharata* proceeds to describe the circumstances leading to her marriage. In Savitri's case, the gap in time from her birth to her marriage was undoubtedly greater than is ordinarily the case. In the present day, a woman is married off while still a young girl; Savitri's marriage took place at a time she was past her youth. Smitten by her extraordinary beauty, people took her to be some

goddess descended on earth. Her great beauty, energy, and spirited nature discouraged suitors from approaching her with intentions of marriage. But as matters turned out, Savitri herself developed an urge to marry, and it is with such intentions that she approached her father. Asvapati felt that since no man had approached her with intentions of marriage, it would be prudent for her to seek a suitable husband for herself. Possibly, such a practice may not have been unknown at the time; there is evidence in the Vedas and Puranas which suggests that girls could be married when in their youth or even thereafter … some of us cite such instances to argue that early marriages in girls are neither reasonable nor supported by Hindu legal texts (*shastras*). Those who support this line of argument also locate in it the wisdom of our ancestors, which, reportedly, preferred adult marriages to child marriages. But this is a wrong line of argument. What passed between Asvapati and his daughter was clearly an exception. The father, in fact, was extremely worried by his daughter not having found a suitor even at a relatively advanced age. Therefore, the question that ought to be asked here is as follows: why was Asvapati worried? After all, Europeans do not worry about daughters remaining unmarried even after they had developed signs of puberty. From this, it can be inferred that the reason for a woman marrying late is not identical in the two cases … Asvapati's verbal exchanges with Savitri clearly reveal that for a Hindu father not gifting his daughter in marriage even when past her youth clearly begets sin before the gods. Evidently, this does not apply to the European father.…

Be it the Vedas or the Puranas, marriages have been shown to be a social imperative and the fear was that if a girl remained unmarried even at the onset of youth, there was a strong possibility of her taking to some scandalous and illegitimate sexual relationship. Our revered legal texts therefore recommend that she be married off and placed under the care and supervision of her husband … if a woman remained unmarried even when in her youth it was quite likely that her body would be defiled and rendered impure if not also the mind. And once the mind itself is tainted, there is no end to the mischief that this can cause.

Acting upon her father's advice, Savitri had mentally come to accept Satyavan as her husband but after it was foretold that he would die within a year of marriage, the distraught Asvapati suggested to his daughter that she seek some other man as her husband. In reply Savitri said:

> The substance comprising a commodity is destroyed only once; fathers give away their daughters in marriage only once and an honourable man declares something to be a gift only once. These three acts are performed but only once. Hence, regardless of the fact that the man I have chosen as my husband has a long life or short, whether he be a virtuous man or not, I will abide by my choice. I can choose no other.

Only a woman like Savitri could have remained so resolute; it was this determination that prevented her body and mind from turning impure….

A person well read in English literature will know that many young women are forced either to accept as husband a man other than the one they personally preferred or else to leave home and lead a disreputable life. This is very likely to happen if a woman remained unmarried even in her youth.

The marriage customs prevalent in our country in very early times continue to this day. Thankfully, in keeping with prescriptions of our law givers such rites and practices that created problems have been excised over time. In early times, it was not uncommon for a daughter to be given in marriage only when she had attained bodily maturity. This should not lead us to believe that the community showed no concern for changes that naturally occurred in her temperament or character as she advanced in years. It was the nagging concern for a daughter's welfare that persuaded parents to get her married promptly once she attained youth. However, over time, paying attention to the daughter's physical growth lost its importance and came to be discarded in practice. From this, it emerges that our present-day marriage customs are only a refined version of older practices….

When marrying his daughter to Satyavan, Asvapati revealed an extraordinary nobility of feeling and judiciousness. At the time, Satyavan's father, Dyumatsena, having lost both his eyesight and kingdom, had retreated to a modest dwelling in the forest and lived the life of a hermit. He had neither the means nor the mental readiness to approach Asvapati with a marriage proposal concerning his son. However, being the kind and considerate man that he was, Asvapati, along with his daughter, Savitri, volunteered to call upon Dyumatsena in his forest dwelling. The sequence of events that I have just described are quite contrary to that which Kashiram (Das)[2] narrates in his Bengali version of the Mahabharata. His narrative completely overturns Asvapati's gentility. He overlooks the fact that rather than arrange for Savitri to be wedded to Satyavan in the royal palace, which would have been the practice ordinarily, Asvapati had the marriage solemnized elsewhere. What Kashiram narrates instead is the practice that affluent Bengali men have adopted in recent times. These men persuade able bodied and educated men from the poorer classes to marry their daughters and thereafter reside permanently in the premises owned by them. I have no clue as to what led our poet to portray a honorable Aryan gentleman as a modern day Bengali. Indeed it is rumored that Kashiram had no knowledge of Sanskrit and composed his work on the basis of what he heard from wandering singer narrators (*kathaks*).

The marriage of Satyavan and Savitri was duly solemnized … the very first act that the new bride performed is as remarkable as it is instructive. Casting aside all the fancy apparel and jewelry that she had been gifted in marriage, Savitri put on a dress made of leaves and bark as befitting life in

the forest…once married to Satyavan, she began to look upon herself as the daughter-in-law of a powerless and poverty-stricken man who had lost his kingdom rather than the daughter of a powerful and prosperous monarch … at present daughters of affluent men, married to men from poorer classes keep boasting of their father's social status and wealth, thereby causing great unhappiness and resentment among members of her husband's family. They even turn to disrespecting elders, arouse jealousy and suspicion among co-wives, and even treat domestic help with cruelty and unkindness. They often resort to poisoning the mind of their husbands or threatening them in some other ways so that they may turn against their father and other members of the extended family. This often results in families breaking up for good….

That many Hindu families are now being wrecked follows from Bengali women entirely forsaking the duties expected of them as wives. It is because they are so remiss of their duties that we must turn to the examples set by the ideal housewife, Savitri. This calls for referring to yet another extraordinary deed performed by Savitri. This virtuous woman would regularly accompany her husband to the forest to gather essentials. One day (as is only too well known) Yama, the god of death, appeared before them and declared that he was there to claim Satyavan whose life, as fated, had come to an end. Though this did not come as a surprise to her, Savitri refused to accept her fate. She followed Yama through the forest, engaging him in religious discourses. At first, Yama tried to dissuade her, directing her to turn back but her deep piety and perseverance also moved him. He then proceeded to grant her a few boons. When it was time to seek the first boon, Savitri, rather than ask something for herself, prayed that eyesight be restored to her blind father-in-law. When asked to seek a second boon, she once again selflessly prayed that Dyumyatsena be allowed to recover his lost kingdom. Only thereafter did she seek something for her father. She prayed that Asvapati be blessed with a hundred sons so that his dynasty may go forward … Savitri's choices clearly put the interests of her father in law above that of her own father.

In countries other than India, wedding rites and customs speak of the wife's duties to the husband alone. In India, they insist on the wife fulfilling certain obligations to other members of the family like the husband's parents and siblings. Women in other countries are tied to the husband alone by virtue of marriage; not so the Hindu wife. Her duties are upheld not by wedding rites alone but certain social conventions prescribed in everyday domestic life … that the bride is not the property of the husband alone, but the entire family is a belief and practice still found in many homes….

Sadly, such time honored conventions have now weakened considerably. Many English-educated Bengalis hold these conventions to be irrational and unjust. For such people, a couple living in an extended family in the company of parents, brother, and uncles is just as abhorrent as the wife

remaining under the control of her in laws. Regrettably, many Hindu housewives are now in favor of setting up independent households where there is no space allowed for the husband's parents or brothers. Their minds are now bereft of affection, devotion, and modesty; such conventionally prized virtues are now being replaced by base feelings of imprudence, indulgence, pride, greed, and vanity.…

Three qualities are usually expected in a Hindu wife: *satitva* (chastity), *patiprem* (love and devotion to the husband), and *pativratya* (fidelity). These, however, are not synonymous words. The woman who does not seek sexual gratification from a man other than the husband is a lover. The loving wife is also a chaste woman since if she loves her husband, thoughts of entering into a sexual relationship with some other man does enter her mind. However, there are many women who do not indulge in sex with men other than husbands even when they do not love their husbands. The chaste woman may not love her husband but one who loves her husband may not be a chaste woman … fidelity to the husband grows from love. When there is no love for the husband, there can be no fidelity either. And yet, one cannot be sure if love for the husband leads to fidelity in every case. In truth, fidelity to the husband arrives from a combination of two factors. There is love no doubt but also the knowledge that the husband is the only means of salvation … that the husband is the only means of spiritual fulfillment for the woman is an idea that occurs in Hinduism alone.…

Indeed, fidelity in a woman grows from love for the husband. However, in the *Mahabharata*, one does not find Savitri as a lover. The author of this epic does not describe Savitri's confessing before Satyavan, the fathomless depths of her love, exhibiting uncontrollable passion with deep sighs of maddening desire, crushing him in a tight amorous embrace … even in Valmiki's great work one is deeply moved by Sita's unflinching love for her husband but nowhere does one find Sita in a lovelorn state, the two lovers gazing at one other unmindful of the world around them … the *Ramayana* is not a tale of romantic love and quite naturally, one cannot expect to find ecstatic love being depicted there. But even the *Abhigyansakuntala*, which is one of the best works based on romantic love, chooses not to depict love in that fashion. True and deep rooted love is not erratic, unstable, frivolous, or impatient. True romance does not create ripples of love, it is somber and settled like some boundless ocean.…

Savitri was a spirited woman and Vyas has described her qualities in some detail in the Mahabharata. He maintains that her very spiritedness discouraged men from proposing to her. These days in Bengali households, women are often heard to complain of the spiritedness (*tej*) in fellow-women. "Oh, that girl is very spirited" or else "that lassie won't let up on her *tej*!" are now common expressions in use. However, from this let no one conclude that Bengali households are now producing Savitris by the dozen. Dissatisfied

with the ornaments gifted by the husband, the Bengali wife flings it away in some disgust; angered by her in laws, the housewife now spiritedly throws back some harsh words at them and rushing back to her room shuts the door with a bang. Thankfully, the *Mahabharata* does not lead us to believe that Savitri's fiery spirit (*tej*) was of this kind … in her case, the spiritedness arose in her sense of righteousness which is far removed from the qualities displayed by our modern day housewives….

There is no greater calamity that may befall a Hindu woman than widowhood. To ensure that our community life, religion, and afterlife are adequately protected, our lawgivers have been forced to recommend a life of utmost austerity for every woman who turns a widow. But in so doing, they were also overtaken by a sense and remorse at the cruelty underlying this recommendation. They deeply empathized with these unfortunate women. It is for this reason that they have placed before the Hindu woman the glorious ideal of Savitri with the advice that they follow her in every respect. They believe that this will secure for every woman an ideal husband and should they unfortunately lose a husband in this life, they will not miss him in the next. With Savitri's noble example before them, the Hindu women and wife observe the *Savitri Vrata* in her honor. In so doing, they commemorate the dreaded night when Savitri defied her fate and brought back a dead husband to life. Those who observe this *vrata* (vow) do so under the belief that this will help them escape the tragedy of widowhood. Savitri is the only true solace for the tragic and tormented widow….

Notes

1 Author's Note: Going by Sanskrit *slokas* and their translation into Bengali, it would appear that Asvapati specifically prayed for not one but several sons and only later asked for a gift of a *santan* (child) for the sake of meeting his dharmic obligations.
2 Editor's Note: A poet of medieval Bengal (c. sixteenth century) who composed the Bengali version of the *Mahabharata*.

16

TWO HINDU WIVES

*That the wife will respect the husband and be devoted to him, that she remain faithful to him and please him in every way, that she would submerge herself in the body and mind of the husband – such is the advice commonly found in older Sanskrit literature. Bankim Babu's[1] *Bishabriksha* and *Krishnakanter Will* are not old Sanskrit works but modern Bengali novels. In these two novels, we are acquainted with the ways of two Hindu wives, Suryamukhi in *Bishabriksha* and Bhramar in *Krishnakanter Will*. It would be interesting to examine which of these characters conform to the ideals propagated in our old Sanskrit literature….

Both Suryamukhi and Bhramar are duty bound, deeply attached to their respective husbands; they also revere them in a manner worthy of respect shown to gurus. In both these women, there is a comparable feeling of love and devotion for the husband. But let me leave aside the question of love at this point. This devotion is something more than the devotion that one attaches to a person one loves. This devotion is unique to the Hindu wife….

Just as the two wives are enamored of their husbands, the husband too deeply loved their wives. But as events turned out, the two wives had to undergo a similar trauma in their lives. Both Nagendranath and Govindalal developed extramarital relations, the former with Kundanandini and the latter with Rohini. However, though the trauma was similar for the two wives, the manner in which they handled it was strikingly different. No doubt they were both deeply hurt but while one of them, though greatly offended,

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Duiti Hindu Patni"in *Tridhara*. Calcutta. Haranath Basu. 2nd ed. 1907 (1st ed. 1900): 30–39.

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decided to please her husband, the other exhibited a strong rage, pique, and resentment toward the husband. The two different reactions also went on to produce two very different consequences. When Suryamukhi realized that without winning the affections of Kundanandini, Nagendranath's life would turn miserable, she voluntarily cast away all her unhappiness and anger and, with the intention of making her husband happy, proceeded to arrange his marriage with Kundanandini. Such selflessness could not have been exhibited by any other than a Hindu wife. However, Suryamukhi found no happiness herself. She expected to derive some happiness in her selfless act – the Hindu wife is apt to think that in her husband's happiness lay her happiness. And yet she stayed unhappy and eventually left him. For a Hindu wife, this proved to be a grave error and the inevitable followed in the course of time as it was destined to. Suryamukhi was eventually forced to recant for her mistake.

Upon leaving her home, Suryamukhi's unhappiness only further intensified; that aggravated feeling came from forsaking the company of her husband. It is then that she realized that there was nothing that was truly hers; all that she had for herself was derived from the husband. And then it also dawned upon her that she had no existence apart from her husband and that this applied equally to Kundanandini, her co-wife. Kundanandini was as much Nagendranath's possession as she herself was. Having realized this, she ran back home to reunite with her husband. The vanity and independent selfhood that Suryamukhi hitherto flaunted, the selfishness that she had once exhibited disappeared altogether. In other countries, such selflessness in women appears only in poetic imagination; in this country, it resides in countless devoted and faithful wives. In other societies, some women have been known to give up their conjugal happiness at the insistence of the husband. However, a Hindu wife alone is capable of so sharing another woman with her husband … without fully understanding the ways of the Hindu wife, the mysteries of love can never be uncovered. Europe has not been able to accomplish this which is why even after reading *Bishbriksha* in translation,[2] they continue to misjudge Suryamukhi. Our society has many Suryamukhis and hence it is only just to recall the instance of Suryamukhi the ideal Hindu wife molded in the classical Sanskrit tradition, in other words, the most exalted embodiment of conjugal love.

When Bhramar learned of Govindalal's yearning for Rohini, she quite lost herself in anger and a strong sense of being wronged. Having sensed her husband's fascination for Kundanandini, Suryamukhi had come to realize that without the new woman in his life, Nagendra would remain extremely despondent and miserable. And so she decided to give up her own claims on her husband only so that he may find happiness … but this quality was entirely lacking in Bhramar. Bhramar's understanding was that if Govindalal remained unhappy at not being able to have Rohini as his wife,

the best course of action would be to get them married … but this realization produced yet another outburst of resentment and anger in her….

Failing to get her husband to change his mind, Bhramar recoiled to herself, accusing Govindalal of treating his wife with gross injustice. She also took Govindalal's behavior to be opposed to accepted social conventions and righteous conduct expected of a man but above all, a violation of the sacred rites of marriage. After reproaching her husband with the harshest words, she retreated to the inner chamber, determined never to meet him again….

After several years had passed after this incident and Govindalal had fallen into pitiable circumstances, he developed a strong desire to return to Bhramar. Bhramar's response to this was simply that while her husband could return home any time, she was not prepared to live with him anymore … clearly, she was still nursing old grievances at being insulted and mistreated and this notwithstanding the fact that Govindalal was now a greatly transformed man, almost half-dead from an acute sense of guilt and shame. However, Bhramar would still not relent. Under similar circumstances, Suryamukhi's response would have been very different.

Are we then to rule that Bhramar was not the ideal Hindu wife?

It is true that Bhramar was extremely offended and angry with her husband. And yet in her heart she had boundless love and respect for him. For Bhramar the husband was the object of the greatest respect and reverence … intense anger combined with such tender love and devotion, which of us can truly solve this mystery! It is because Bhramar is a Hindu wife that she carries within her such inscrutable mystery. A Hindu wife alone can combine in herself such seemingly contradictory qualities. Whether in Europe or America, resentment toward the husband reveals deep seated hatred and disenchantment … on the contrary, we found in Suryamukhi and Bhramar two Hindu wives who were wronged by their husbands and yet, their handling of infidelity is palpably different. What explains this difference? Was Bhramar's love tainted by selfishness? Does that explain her irate reaction? We have not been able to locate any selfish thoughts in Bhramar. The woman whose love for her husband is affected by petty self-interest will exhibit neither love nor devotion toward the husband. Why, then, was Bhramar so angry at Govindalal? Perhaps the answer lies in the following exchange of words at the time Govindalal deserted Bhramar:

Govindalal: "I will now take your leave".
Bhramar: "When will you return?"
Govindalal: "Never".
Bhramar: "Why not? I am your wedded wife, a disciple, a woman dependent on you, your menial servant, a woman always looking up to you for words of affection. Why, then, will you not return?"

Govindalal: "I simply have no intentions of returning".
Bhramar: "Is there no justice (dharma) on earth! You have forsaken me for no reason. But do remember, there is God above us who remains a witness to everything we mortals do".

In the last few words we may locate the true reasons for Bhramar's anger and indignation. Bhramar chose not to remind Govindalal that she was his legally wedded wife and hence, could not be so brusquely forsaken. Instead, she reminded him that he was the offender who, by treating her wrongfully, would bring upon himself the charge of unlawful (*adharmic*) conduct. It was the blatant transgression of commonly accepted social and moral codes that made her fly into a rage. The Hindu wife, the very embodiment of *dharma* cannot stand to see dharma being so violated … so long as people with such high feelings reside in our homes, we may justly continue to entertain great hopes for ourselves. Women like Bhramar are not simply literary creations; they truly exist in our community.

Was Suryamukhi not faithful to her husband? If she was, why did she not exhibit the same degree of anger and resentment that we find in Bhramar? After all, Nagendranath and Govindalal were equally at fault when it comes to cheating their wives. Why, then, did Suryamukhi act differently? This is not quite the place to fully address this question. Suffice to say that just as some wives cannot bear to see their husbands commit wrongful acts, others cannot bear to see them suffer or turn miserable. The latter volunteer, even at the cost of enduring unhappiness themselves, to lessen the suffering of their husbands. Here is the key to Suryamukhi's behavior. As a community, the Hindus are now besieged with many problems and yet what gives us hope are signs of such selflessness that pervades our domestic life.

Suryamukhi and Bhramar were made of the same material but cast in different molds … Suryamukhi was cast in the mold that Sanskrit literature has consistently valorized. Women of this genre have been described as ideal women. In that literature, however, there is no praise for the woman resembling Bhramar. I cannot say with any certainty if women of the latter category were adequately present in the times gone by. Now their number appears to have increased manifold….

We have had occasion to see how when confronted with identical problems how Suryamukhi and Bhramar reacted differently and how the social consequences following from their actions were also different. The way Suryamukhi proceeded to meet her challenges produced salutary results. Her actions ultimately rescued Nagendranath from his burden of sins, held intact the larger family into which he had been born, and generally allowed people to return to a life of happiness and contentment that they had been enjoying before the sordid drama involving Nagendranath and Kundanandini unfolded itself. In the end, Suryamukhi was reunited with her husband and

the couple had children of their own and lived a happy life thereafter. I have no doubt that had Kundanandini survived the self inflicted tragedy,[3] she too would have led a happy life in the company of her husband and her co-wife, Suryamukhi. Bhramar's conduct, on the contrary, proved catastrophic. She died prematurely as did her husband, Govindalal. The family to which Govindalal belonged became extinct for lack of an heir. An illustrious family, their good reputation, and sizeable assets were all lost to time. Perhaps by foreseeing such unsavory results did the Sanskrit literature of the old prefer and valorize a woman like Suryamukhi.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: The reference is to the popular novelist and thinker, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay (1838–1894). *Bishbriksha* and *Krishnakanter Will* are among his most successful novels, published in 1873 and 1878, respectively.
2 Editor's Note: The novel was translated into English by Miriam S. Knight in 1884 and given the title "The Poison Tree".
3 Editor's Note: In the novel, Kundanandini kills herself by consuming poison.

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17

TALE OF THE ENGLISH SCHOLAR

*At some distance from Calcutta, located on the western banks of the Ganges is Uttarpara, which is a well-known spot, made famous by the presence of the local landowner, Joykrishna Mukhopadhyay.[1] Almost everybody has also heard of the Uttarpara Hitakari Sabha, especially on account of the annual event it organizes to pass judgment on the quality of mangoes grown in Bombay. Uttarpara has an excellent school, a charitable dispensary, a thriving marketplace, and a municipality. That apart, it has the celebrated local library; of the institutions that make up modern civic life it lacks only a judiciary. However, as matters stand, even without a local courtroom, the incidence of litigation among its residents is quite high; one can only speculate as to what the situation might have been had there been one!

A few days back I had traveled to Uttarpara and happened to meet a few friends. I also had the opportunity of visiting the local library which has a rich collection of books, journals, and newspapers pertaining to India. While rummaging through this collection, I came upon a highly interesting book. The book was by no means small; it had about 150 pages and was titled *Sudhabindu Samgraha*. In this book were included three essays; one about the Maratha raids[2] in Bengal, the second about the Vaishnava deity Madanmohana[3] at Vishnupur, and the third on a near contemporary English scholar who was in India for a time. It is this scholar that I write about in this essay.

Here goes the story. The well-known Sanskrit scholar Colebrook[4] was very fond of Pundit Jagannath Tarkapanchanan.[5] One day, the Englishman

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Bilati Panditer Kotha" in *Tridhara*. Calcutta. Haranath Basu. 3rd ed. 1907 (1890): 63–72.

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paid a visit to the Pundit at his residence at Triveni.[6] The Pundit welcomed the Englishman and offered him a wooden stool to sit upon. The Englishman accepted the seat without a protest. At that point, the Pundit started smoking on his native hookah, and placing a piece of burning charcoal near his guest said, "Sir, you are free to smoke your cigar; only ensure that the drifting smoke from your cigar does not come into contact with my body in any way", whereupon Colebrook started smoking on his cigar.

While enjoying their smoke, the two men fell into a brisk conversation, mostly on the subject of *Dayabhaga*.[7] At the time, Colebrook was translating a Sanskrit legal treatise known by that name. That would explain why he engaged the Pundit in a conversation on the subject.[8]

About two hours had passed in the absorbing conversation, the Pundit offered to feed his guest. He offered some fruits and a large bowl full of milk. The Englishman drank little of the milk but took a liking for the fruits offered. Of bananas he requested some more. While Colebrook was relishing the bananas, the Pundit narrated to him some jokes related to the fruit at which the Englishman laughed heartily.

After the food had been consumed by the guest, the two men resumed their conversation. The Englishman had high praise for Sanskrit language and for the copious literature which it had produced in the past. However, in the course of the conversation he also expressed disappointment at this language failing to produce any authentic histories. Pundit Jagannath, startled by this remark, retorted: "Sir, I am astonished to hear that. How can there be no histories in Sanskrit".

The following is the conversation that then took place between the two men:

Colebrook: "Indeed, there isn't any"

Pundit: "What, then, are the *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*, if not histories?"

Colebrook: "Those are not histories. The two epics are poetic works (*kavya*); the Puranas are work of pure fiction"

Pundit: "What if they are poetic works or works of fiction? Can these not include history?"

Colebrook: "How can that be so? History is the record of events as they actually occurred. The Purnaas do not carry any such information".

Pundit: "For the sake of argument let us assume that the Puranas do not record actual historical events. Even so, why cannot they be taken to be history? They dwell at length on the features of Hindu domestic life or the consequences following from changing relationships between castes. I grant that information on everyday social life related to a people or principles of governance can be derived only from actual observation. However,

even if information given in these texts be born of human imagination, why should they cease to be counted as history? Take the *Hitopadesha*[9] for example in which birds and animals are made to deliver moral truths that human beings ought to follow. Does that render the *Hitopadesha* a work of fiction? Similarly, in the Puranas, the sage Vedvyas has recorded his observations on the state of social and political life in contemporary India. Even assuming that his observations are not drawn from historical records will this turn Puranas into mere works of fiction? Let me put another question to you. You claim that the Puranas do not record actual historical occurrences. On what basis do you make such claims? How could you possibly know if the war between Ram and Ravana, the great battle at Kurushetra or the tale of King Harishchandra were figments of pure imagination?"

Colebrook: "Okay, let us examine the battle between Rama and Ravana. Does it look probable that Rama killed Ravana with the help of bears and monkeys?"

Pundit: "Why Sir, would it not be reasonable to compare English sailors at the Calcutta port to a bunch of monkeys?"

Colebrook: (laughing) "I grant you that. When it comes to levels of education or intelligence, they are not any better off than apes!"

Pundit: "But it is with their help that you have sailed across vast oceans. Why, then, is it impossible for a king to defeat a rival king with the help from similar people?"

Colebrook: "Be that as it may, it still stands to reason that the Puranas do not describe any historical events".

Pundit: "There you go again! How you know that the events were not historical?"

Colebrook: Let us keep that argument aside for the time being. Are you in a position to admit that the Puranas do not carry the characteristic features of historical writings?"

Pundit: "What, in your opinion, are the defining qualities of history?"

Colebrook: "Its foremost quality is that it does not speak of imagined or unnatural events but only of those which actually occurred in time".

Pundit: "Oh, but we agreed to keep that argument aside for a moment. Why bring this up again?"

Colebrook: "I do so only because in defining history that is the quality that we must first speak of"

Pundit: "But you do concede that the Puranas do not entirely lack that quality?"

Colebrook: "That is true but there is one other matter. Describing a true event does not necessarily constitute history. There is a

particular method in writing history; should that method be absent, just any narrative cannot be taken as history".

Pundit: "What exactly is that method?"

Colebrook: "Providing detailed descriptions of every aspect concerning a person or an event".

Pundit: "How so?"

Colebrook: It is difficult to explain my point without the aid of an appropriate example"

Pundit: "Let us then hear of your example"

Colebrook: "Consider the *Ramayana* for example. The *Ramayana* is the tale of King Ramchandra. Before we speak of any person, we must state the particulars relating to his place of birth. But there is very little of Ayodhya in the *Ramayana* itself. There is no information on its geographical location, its position in the scale of latitude and longitude. Also there is no information on what the place might have been called before Rama's birth or to put it differently, there is much information that is all in error. How, then, am I to say that the *Ramayana* carries the signs of being a historical work?"

Pundit: "Go on, Sir, this is all very instructive to hear".

Colebrook: "In the *Ramayana*, there is naturally no description of Rama's birth. If the *Ramayana* were a historical work it would have carried the following details relating to Rama's birth: the particular day of a month and the relevant month in a particular year. It would say that as the clock struck 8 hours, 37 minutes and 19 seconds, Rama was born. Some accounts claim that the correct time would be 19.5 seconds and not 19. But even after four and half years of unceasing investigation we have been forced to conclude that it was indeed 8: 37: 19. Those who pressed for the revised time of birth had to be in the wrong. They also claim that the room in which Rama was born, measured 7x4x5 cubits. After a thorough investigation into this question we discovered that the man who had built the birth chamber had no recollection of the original measurements… it is very unlikely that the Chief Queen's maternity chamber measured only 7x4x5 cubits. It is more likely to have been 27x40x500 cubits….

After Rama was born, the Queen Kaushalya's Chief of Staff informed the King of the birth of his son precisely at 10 hours, 11 minutes, and 22 seconds. At the time the following court officials were present beside the king himself: the Chief Minister, seven courtiers, six assistants, four *khansamas*, two spies, two clerks, four couriers, and 12 sentries. Hearing the good news about the

birth of a son, King Dasarath promptly descended from his splendid throne. The throne was built of gold in which were embedded several precious stones worth 1.5 crores. It weighed in excess of one *maund*[10] …. Dasarath was so overwhelmed with joy that he unknowingly put on the shoe meant for his left foot on the right and in that unmindful state he entered the inner chamber belonging to his chief Queen. This extremely important detail had hitherto escaped the attention of all historians, and it is thus that older accounts of Rama's birth are no longer to be trusted. We were able to retrieve this valuable information only after 28 years of painstaking research. Recovering this information has enabled us to duly protect the value of historical accuracy….

Pundit: "Stop, you must not say any more. Is this the way that history is written?"
Colebrook: "Yes"
Pundit: "Had Valmiki written his *Ramayana* in this manner would it have counted as history?"
Colebrook: "Certainly".
Pundit: "How many such histories do you think your culture has so far produced?"
Colebrook: "Oh, thousands and thousands of them, really beyond count!"
Pundit: "Do your people rate these works highly?"
Colebrook: "Of course. In fact the more a man reads history the more he comes to be rated as a scholar"
Pundit: "Are such works studied in your *tols*[11] too?"
Colebrook: "We do not have *tols,* only modern schools, colleges and universities. In these institutions of learning, boys have to study a great number of historical works, failing which they are taken to be uneducated".
Pundit: "Sir, I suggest that you stay with your histories and your methods of education. We remain contented with our tales and legends. Now let us change the subject".

Notes

1 Editor's Note: The well-known landowner of Uttarpara, district Hoogly, W. Bengal. A prominent public figure and philanthropist with many accomplishments to his credit including the library he started in 1854, now named after him. His dates are 1800–1888.
2 Editor's Note: Series of brisk invasions by Maratha troops into Bengal between 1741 and 1751, which badly affected the local agrarian economy and caused much fear and distress in the population. This fear came to be later expressed in folklore.
3 Editor's Note: A representation of the Hindu god Krishna which was adopted by Durjan Singh of the Malla dynasty in Vishnupur, as their family deity. Many folk ballads were composed on how this deity fought on the side of his devotees,

defending them against the invading Marathas. The Madanmohan temple that exists today is one of the finest specimens of terracota art.

4 Editor's Note: Henry Thomas Colebrook (1755–1837), prominent Indologist who researched Vedic literature and translated into English both the *Miakshara* and *Dayabhaga* systems of Hindu civil law.

5 Editor's Note: A prominent logician and scholar of Hindu law who assisted Sir William Jones with the preparation of Hindu law digests. His dates are 1694–1806.

6 Editor's Note: A holy pilgrimage site on the Ganges in district Hoogly, W. Bengal. This was also a prominent settlement for Brahmin scholars.

7 Editor's Note: A legal treatise on the subject of Hindu law of inheritance ascribed to Jimutvahana. The Dayabhaga System specifically applied to Bengal and Assam as contrasted to the *Mitakshara* system of Vijneswara which applies to the rest of India.

8 Author's Note: This is entirely my own surmise; the book itself makes no such suggestion.

9 Editor's Note: Attributed to one Narayan Pundit, possibly composed between 800–950 CE. Mostly borrowed from the *Panchatantra* and includes animal fables carrying moral instructions.

10 A unit for measuring weight, now not in use. A *maund* usually equaled 40 seers which is slightly more than 37 kilograms.

11 Editor's Note: Seminaries for advanced learning in Sanskrit language and literature, Hindu religion, philosophy, grammar, and other allied subjects. Open to Brahmin boys only.

18

OF BIOGRAPHIES

*In the field of English literature, that which is known as biography is absent in Sanskrit literature. A few works belonging to this specie of writing such as the *Sankara Digvijaya*[1] are known to exist, though it is generally held that even these have not quite been written in a manner comparable to European works. On the contrary, it is my belief that there do exist in Sanskrit literature works that may be justly deemed as biographies.

In Europe, a great deal of attention is paid to the writing of biographies as indeed is the case with other forms of literary work. On the European continent, there may actually be no notable person on whom a biographical work has not been produced! And there is no end to the trivial details that such works include. You might expect to find references to just how a man eats, sleeps, goes for a walk, and even yawns! There is really no virtue in incorporating such details and yet these works continue to carry such useless information. In truth, biographies ought to be restricted to a limited number. I imagine not everybody deserves a biographical account of his life and work. If the purpose of writing a biography is to impact public education, then their number ought not to exceed 50 or 60 for the entire world. Of what use is it to impart the same education or instruction through countless books? Most biographical accounts published in Europe carry no educational value, and in most of these, the same knowledge is repeated. In contemporary Europe, people are deeply and unjustifiably addicted to reading and writing, and this has led to countless biographies being produced

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: "Jeeboner Kotha" (*Tridhara*). Calcutta. Haranath Basu. 3rd ed. 1907 (1890): 72–76.

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over time. Authors don't pause to reflect on the propriety of producing these books in great numbers or to sit in judgment over them. Also, people have unsuspectingly taken to the habit of reading everything that is available to them in written form.

If the purpose of a biography is to simply recall the life and work of a certain individual, I would have to say that this is quite unnecessary. Events or occurrences that come to be associated with an individual even after his death are bound to remain in public memory for a long time regardless of whether such events have been commemorated in some biographical work. We have not commemorated the life of every ancient sage or teacher but they are still alive in our memory. That which is unlikely to survive someone's death will not be of much use even if these do enter some biography. People had known of Rammohun Roy[2] even before the first biography on him came to be written, and such knowledge continues to be available to us. What is bound to be obliterated with time, human efforts cannot preserve. Memories that are so obliterated with time ought to remain obliterated. Indeed, there is no biographer superior to time. Prof. Masson[3] has produced a lengthy biography of Milton which carries a wealth of detail. On the other hand, that which was worthy of being known about Milton must have been gathered earlier. People are not likely to add to their knowledge of Milton by reading Masson's work. That is what happens commonly and there is every probability of that continuing to happen.

The critical question before us is the following: how is it that knowledge available to us is best preserved for posterity? European biographers prefer to record this information in biographical works. But such works carry such unnecessary and extravagant details that only a few will have the patience to read the entire book in order to get to its substance. Hence, if biographies are to be the preferred medium for retaining that which is necessary and useful, we need to seriously consider effecting changes to the art of writing biographies….

Sanskrit literature may not have biographies in the accepted sense of the term today, but this cannot be tantamount to saying that it also lacks the essential ingredients that go into the making of a biography. Our Puranas contain several stories about a number of people. Some of these stories are on the devotion paid to a teacher, some others on reverence for the mother, yet others are stories about truthfulness, generosity, and self-restraint. It is my belief that such stories are not entirely imagined or fabricated. These are, in truth, historical and biographical accounts enriched by human imagination. The intention behind these stories was never to recount the glories of certain individuals. They do not reveal the tendency to propagate personal glory or fame. To claim authorship for oneself and denounce other works as only plagiarized are not habits identifiable with authors of Sanskrit literature. This literature does not throw up an abundance of names; on the

contrary, think of the countless authors who have concealed their identity behind the generic name of "Vyasa". Such men were truly selfless and noble; they found personal satisfaction in serving the cause of knowledge and righteous conduct (dharma). The desire to seek power and fame never seized them. It is for this reason that in Puranic work we do not celebrate individual lives; in such works, exemplary deeds performed by individuals are held up as ideals for the entire community to follow. That is biography and history in their highest forms. It is therefore that in our tradition, Puranas are given the status of history (*itihasa*) … in these works personal lives become a part of national life, individuality merges with the whole. Adopting such methods of writing biographies will demand excising all thoughts of vanity, selfishness and self gratification. Once achieved, that would be no mean achievement.

I pray that authors writing in Bengali prefer the Hindu method of writing biographies to the European. We have yet not realized our true humanity. So long as we do not realize this, no true biography can be produced. No biographical accounts are really required to be written yet on the handful of men and women who have realized their potentiality as human beings. Let this enterprise be left to time. After we have realized our collective humanity and enable our visions, aspirations, morality, and religion to acquire distinctive forms, when our destiny guides us to the correct path of self-realization, we shall proceed to create a new history of the Bengali people in which shall be included the remarkable life histories of such people. As of now there is really no need for us to produce biographies of Bengalis. Should we truly attain humanity, the new Puranas authored by us will carry the inspiring life of Savitri as was the case with the older Sanskrit tradition of Vyas. Time does not destroy all that is truly good and ennobling.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: A medieval hagiographic work attributed to Madhva Vidyaranya celebrating the life and times of the noted Vedanta philosopher, Sankaracharya c. ninth century.
2 Editor's Note: Rammohun Roy (1772–1833), rated as India's first modern man. Persuaded the government to abolish the sati and wished to promote a modern education and a reformed religious and moral life among fellow Hindus.
3 Editor's Note: The reference is to the work by David Masson titled *The Life of John Milton. Narrated in Connection with the Political, Ecclesiastical and Literary History of His Time*. London. Macmillan & Co. 1871.

19

THE STATE OF CONTEMPORARY BENGALI LITERATURE

*At the outset we must deal with the category of literature itself, however briefly. If the world was inhabited by a solitary man, he would have been a mute creature no doubt. And even if he were not so, there would have been no reason for him to employ the power of speech. It is because the world is so thickly populated that there arises the need for communication. It is with the intention of letting others know their minds that people take to communicating with each other. It is with the same intention that they also write. Unless it was his intention to allow others to know of his feelings or emotions why would he write at all? He could quite easily keep his thoughts to himself, and even if he was writing to refresh his memory from time to time, there was really no need for him to author some book. What he writes could be easily kept to himself rather than put it in the public domain. If a man authors a book and arranges for its sale or distribution, it must be understood that his intention was to enable other people to read what he had authored. This argument applies equally to philosophers, poets, historians, or scientists. However, it is important to ensure that what others read will not bring them any harm. Both morality and religion maintain that no man has the right to harm another … hence what we write for others must be written with their best interests in mind. It is improper to write something when driven by private passions alone or else for deriving self-gratification….

That literature which causes ill effects in society or contributes to produce bad taste or intentions, mutual jealousy and bickering, extravagance, duplicity, hypocrisy etc. is not worthy of being considered as literature. On the

* Excerpted from Chandranath Basu: *Bartaman Bangla Sahityer Prokriti*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 1899. Expanded version of paper read before the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat, 1898.

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other hand, that which brings the greatest benefits to the greatest number of people becomes especially worthy of our support and approval. The same can be said of literature….

If it be our intention to employ literature in improving the lives of a good number of people, regardless of their class or social standing, writers must take to a language and linguistic style that would be at once intelligible and useful to people. Such language must be simple, lucid, and free of local peculiarities. Literature brings no benefit to the people unless this happens to be the case….

It is a truism that the more some literature is able to bring benefits to the common people, the more likely it is to acquire the qualities of a national literature. From this, it follows that people belonging to a particular nation or community are able to expand and consolidate their feelings of nationality. Once we are able to create literature keeping in mind the welfare of the entire community, a lot of work that is noble, beautiful, and pure can be performed. By itself, literature is something small or insignificant … much depends on how and to what purpose it is created and disseminated. Just as good literature will produce exemplary and enduring results, literature that does not meet the standards of goodness is bound to produce ugly and unpalatable results. Literature that produces unwholesome social results and inhibits the growth of the community cannot qualify as national literature. In truth, such literature is neither national nor literature. Let me now turn to a discussion on the present state of Bengali literature.

I recall that when I was a student at Gourmohan Addya's[1] school, Pundit Iswarachandra Vidyasagar's *Betala Panchabingshati*[2] was a prescribed text book for us. At the time, everyone had high praise for his Bengali prose style. It is not as though such praise has ceased altogether and yet, the popularity of his writings appears to have now gone down in public estimation. His writings are now regarded as belonging to an older, ornate style, no longer enjoyed as widely as before. Sometime after he began writing, a new class of Bengali writers emerged. Upon reading their works, some of us were heard to say that the Bengali language was a language that lacked a standing or legitimacy. By this they probably meant to argue that just as a property of a man who had no descendants was likely to be misappropriated by others, the new crop of Bengali writers failed to make their mark on posterity, allegedly on account of the highly ungrammatical nature of their prose. This accusation is borne out by the reviews of their works that appeared in the contemporary Bengali press. Some critics even went to the extent of ridiculing and abusing the new writers for such shortcomings. Those critics who leveled such accusations against the new writers are still to be found in good numbers and almost all of them belonged to the older class of scholars trained in Sanskrit. However, this Pundit class ultimately failed to hold sway … the point here is that people refused to accept such criticism seriously. The

new writers steadily grew in numbers and managed to draw the attention of a great many people to their writings. In the present times, the new writers have completely dominated the literary field of Bengal. It is not as though the older class of writers has ceased to exist; the truth of the matter is that a good number of them have stepped aside and some among them have even succeeded in striking a friendship with the emerging writers and acquiesce in accepting some of the new literary conventions created by the latter. That the Bengali language is no one's asset is not a cry that is now heard with any regularity and yet I would have to say that this accusation holds more truth now than in the days gone by. This is because the new literature, apart from being affected by grammatical weaknesses, has developed new shortcomings. These shortcomings were rarely visible in the older literature. At the root of this lies our mental incapacities and blemishes of character … We now lack the qualities of true patriotism, love of our friends and relatives, feelings of cordiality, devotion, compassion, and altruism. Ironically enough, judging by the literature that we now produce some are likely to take us for the most patriotic, compassionate, well endowed with the qualities of love for the fellow being and selfless in our attitude towards the other. This, for the greater part, is specious patriotism. When in school I had never heard of any one shed copious tears of remorse for Mother India (*Bharatmata*) or fill the earth and sky with hoarse cries about the glorious civilization that Indian was once. After a few years, someone composed a patriotic poem and another started an annual fair[3] and at once heart rending cries of a captive Mother India filled the air and fiery claims began to be made to free her of that captivity. This pretentious patriotism gradually affected other noble qualities of our heart, making a mockery of these. We do not revere our parents, but in our speeches, books, essays and newspaper articles we speak so overwhelmingly of our great departed souls. In the event of people not speaking highly of these souls, we make such sharp public accusations against the offenders that anyone who closely follows our responses is bound to come to the conclusion that devotion to greatness is a quality that was first developed among us! Among us there is little love between brothers and yet we continue to produce lengthy treatises on the power of love, filling our books, journals, and sundry writings with ardent feelings of universal love! Inside us there is empty space, but in our speeches and writings we can contain the entire world!….

As with the qualities of love and devotion, we also lack the power of constructive thought. But this does not appear to worry us. Just as we pretend to be loving and devoted so also with the act of thinking. We are incapable of profound thinking but remain anxious to be acknowledged as a profound thinker. This leaves us with no choice but to enter the domain of convoluted thinking. Suspecting that expressing ourselves in the simplest manner will not lead people to treat us as a thoughtful person, we deliberately take to the

use of bloated language and expressions … this explains why contemporary Bengali language has developed some fault lines. One of these is verbosity and extravagance. That which can be easily said in three verses is extended to thirty; that which can be ended in about 30 pages is made to end in three hundred … even the baker's dough does not rise as much under preparation … simplicity is truly under siege!….

Certain domains of our literature remain extremely inhospitable; it is difficult to even enter them, not to speak of inhabiting them. In these domains there is simply stormy excitement. Even with the wind only slightly up, conditions become stormy and the storm does not show signs of abating! A small and insignificant locality in Calcutta decided to celebrate the first anniversary of an even more insignificant library and at once stormy words began to gather!:

> By the grace of the Omnipotent Power which, by virtue of its infinite skills, has created this infinite universe we have completed one year of our existence, stepping into our second year![4]

A desert storm causes irritation to people by scattering immense amounts of sand. Our minds have now turned into veritable deserts with storms brewing all the time!

The problems with the state of current writings in Bengali that I have only briefly listed did not feature in the work of the older class of pundits. Thus, with the increase in the volume of Bengali literature, our problems too appear to have increased manifold. Unless appropriate steps are taken to reform these, it would not be befitting to acknowledge Bengali literature as sound literature. At this time, this literature appears to do more harm than good, and I have reason to doubt if the desired reforms can be carried out with any ease. The root cause of these problems lies in our minds, and unless the mind is suitably reformed I see no way in which we can overcome our problems….

For a few years now, I have been noticing the increasing use of rustic idioms and corrupt linguistic forms in our essays and other writings … people seem to pay little attention to the linguistic beauty, appropriateness, or appeal behind the choice of words … the common habit now is to somehow say something briefly and in the shortest possible manner. But this is not a habit that will suit us when communicating with other people. When stepping outside our homes, we always pay extra attention to the way we dress ourselves, and this applies equally to our literary expressions….

The use of local idioms discourages greater and more effective exchange of ideas. If people of one district start imitating people in other districts in the use of these idioms, communication between people will be rendered extremely difficult. There will then be as many types of Bengali literature as

there are administrative districts in the province of Bengal. This urges us to discard the use of local idioms. Literature is for the good of the entire community, not for some chosen people residing in a particular area. Forgetful of the good that a common literature can do for promoting unity, brotherhood, and national feeling, we are simply tainting our literature with the continued use of narrow, inappropriate, and distasteful idioms or expressions. This is little apart from short sighted insularity and selfishness….

There is yet another way in which Bengali literature inhibits national unity among us. It is quite evident that prose styles popular in east Bengal districts and in the west are different. While at first glance, the differences may appear superficial, they actually run deep … indeed they run so deep that some prominent residents of east Bengal have argued that the textbooks to be used in their schools cannot be approved by the Central Text Book Committee located in Calcutta. For this reason, they have repeatedly petitioned the authorities for setting up a parallel Text Book Committee in the city of Dacca. To the best of my knowledge, a delegation from east Bengal personally called on Sir Antony McDonnell[5] when he was Lt. Governor of Bengal. However, Sir Antony is known to have declined the request, stating that it was undesirable that the same province should have twin selection committees. That people of the same province should so sharply disagree on this important matter is further proof of the fact that our literature has not yet assumed the character of a national literature … this state of affairs is most unfortunate and capable of producing much mischief … this is no literature at all that we have. Literature creates social bonding; it facilitates the growth of a nation, helping people to overcome feelings of mutual animosity and all divisive tendencies….

The question that is to be asked here is just how are these differences between the eastern and western divisions in Bengal to be overcome. The only practical solution is to opt for one of the two linguistic styles or idioms and propagate that to the fullest. That begets the further question: which of these are we to give up? … the resolution to such difficult questions cannot rest on the will or intentions of one single person; it must be determined in keeping with the common good. It is only logical that that which causes lesser difficulties or public inconvenience upon being discarded must be the one to be discarded. According to the list of publications provided by the Bengal Library under the control of the Bengal Government, it emerges that Calcutta alone publishes 2.5 times the number of books published for the entire province of Bengal. In the year 1897, whereas 444 books were published from the divisions of Bhagalpur, Burdwan, Chota Nagpur, Dacca, Presidency, and Rajshahi, no less than 1,062 were published from Calcutta alone. Again, on comparing the divisions of Dacca and Chittagong in East Bengal with Bhagalpur, Burdwan, and Presidency division and the city of Calcutta in West Bengal, we find that in the year 1897 whereas only 220

books were published in the aforesaid divisions of East Bengal, West Bengal produced as many as 1,242. From this we may conclude that it would cause people less distress if we were to get East Bengal to accept the ways of West Bengal. Also, Calcutta is now the capital of our province and ideally; therefore, the language spoken there ought to be the language spoken by all Bengalis. In the days of Maharaja Krishnachandra,[6] the language spoken in Nadia was held to be the model language for all Bengali, and hence, treating the language prevalent in Calcutta the same way would only be consistent with our traditions and history. In all countries there is a special respect attached to culture in the capital city. If it be our intention to elevate Bengali literature to the status of a model literature, it is important that we remove all possible reasons for differences and discord that mar the unity of the Bengali people. This will naturally require people speak the same language regardless of their geographical location within the province of Bengal….

In order to carry out this reform, we must begin by collecting sample copies of books published in local dialects. As I recall, the late Anandaram Barooah[7] had plans to carry this out and possibly had even submitted a proposal to this effect to the government. Sadly, time has claimed him prematurely as well as his noble efforts. Will the Bangiya Sahitya Parsihat[8] agree to take up this responsibility? This is a responsibility that quite naturally rests with the Parishat.

We shall now turn to yet another feature evident in contemporary Bengali literature. This feature arises not from differences in geographical locations but in our growing familiarity with western education. We now devote far greater time and energy to the study of the English language than we do to the study of Bengali or Sanskrit. For this reason, the Bengali that we write turns out to be closer to English than to Bengali….

The handful of Bengalis who have learned the English language may well understand this kind of Bengali although I doubt if even they are always able to understand it fully. There can be no doubt that millions of Bengalis who are unfamiliar with the English language are completely incapable of understanding it. That part of Bengali literature which employs such synthetic and unnatural forms of Bengali cannot prove useful or instructive to the majority of our people. The presence or absence of such forms will not make the slightest difference to them. By this I wish to argue that the literature that the English educated in this province are creating is not our national literature; for countless non-western-educated Bengalis, entry into this field of literature is effectively barred. This is unfortunate since it is a general rule that with the exception of medicine and other technical fields, literature is produced in a language that is intelligible to the common man….

The school text books that we produce for the benefit of students are often written to satisfy our personal fancies, not with the intention of suitably instructing students. These are not written in a language that they will

readily understand … so incapable we are of thinking beyond ourselves. Regardless of how raucously we register our patriotic cries or support our compatriots, in reality these are but empty boasts … It is true that literature creates man, the community, and the nation, but unless men truly have access to the right kind of literature, there is no possibility of literature being able to perform these tasks. It is practically impossible that self-centered and selfish men will be able to produce true literature….

When writing, it is important that we keep two things in mind. First, we must try and maintain the autonomy and dignity of the language in which we are writing. That which can be expressed in one's own language ought not to be expressed in any other. When this rule is overlooked, one's humanity and self-respect are both compromised. Englishmen simply hate to write in any other idiom than that which comes naturally to them. The Englishman is truly a man; he has strong feelings of self-respect. The Bengali language may be poor in comparison and yet not poor enough to induce thoughts of writing Bengali in the style of the English. Second, literature ought not to be produced to satisfy personal whims or urges. It ought to be primarily directed at others and to ensure that others stand to benefit. Hence we must not adopt a literary style that will not be readily intelligible to others; on the contrary, if a superior but intelligible idiom be integrated with the common man's language, it will give expression to empathy and understanding for our fellow men….

It is only fair that we bring up yet another method which will prevent the English language corrupting the Bengali … It is true that if a Bengali gentleman attempts to imitate the English, he does not quite become one and yet it is quite possible that he begins to strongly resemble the Englishman. When that happens, the Bengali gentleman loses some of his natural qualities as a Bengali and therefore becomes somewhat incapable of behaving like one. If a Bengali writer makes an extra effort to write like an Englishman, he may not be able to produce faultless English but nevertheless acquires some of the mental qualities of the Englishman which goes into the making of English literature. That renders him quite incapable of writing in the manner a Bengali normally would. Even if he failed to imbibe the mental qualities of the Englishman fully, excessive attention paid to the English language produces in him a reluctance to write in his native language. And even if he does commit himself to writing in Bengali, he is practically left with no choice but to model his literature on the lines of the English. There are glowing instances of a few great men among us, now departed, whose writings amply bear this out. With such men, writing English in the manner expected of an Englishman was the chief goal in life and they tried very hard at accomplishing this. Regrettably, such attempts have not borne fruit. Their writings have not contributed to enhance the glories of the English language,

and their fame as writers of English is appreciated neither among Bengalis nor the English….

Many Englishmen seriously take to the study of the Sanskrit language and eventually establish themselves as scholars in that language. And yet, they are loath to producing quality compositions in Sanskrit. Recently, there was a literary meeting held in Calcutta where a speaker delivered a lecture in Sanskrit. However, the well-known Sanskrit scholar from Oxford, Bendall,[9] who presided over the event was heard to say the following: "I do not lecture in Sanskrit. I can never perform that task well". Hence, those Englishmen or Europeans who study Sanskrit do so with the primary intention of gathering knowledge from Sanskrit literature. It is never their wish to be counted among famed writers in Sanskrit. The same may be said of those Englishmen and women who learn the Bengali language. Ms. Knight translated the *Bishbrikkha*[10] into English to reveal before the people of her country the conjugal love found in Bengali households. I doubt if she has ever composed even a couple of lines in Bengali herself….

There is one other matter. When those Bengalis who excelled in writing English took to writing in Bengali, they produced a Bengali that was English in character. This was bound to happen. We may justly take pride in the fact that they did not stop with writing in English but chose to write in Bengal as well. In so doing they also transferred to their countrymen, knowledge they had themselves derived from their western education. This is indeed commendable. However, those men who write Bengali in the English way possess neither the level of knowledge that the previous generation had nor their literary skills. They do not produce Bengali literature with the same intentions as the previous generation did. Men of this generation have a weaker conscience and are never as enthused by the noble instincts or intentions of benefiting their countrymen….

Some of us are heard to say that Bengali written in the English way is not so bad after all. They believe that the Bengali language stands to be enriched in this way. But I doubt if those who resort to the use of this synthetic language do this with the purpose of enriching their language. This follows either from their English education or else from excessively leaning toward the English language. I hope people will come to realize that those who are driven by such motives are entirely in the wrong. To those who think that the synthetic Bengali will actually enrich the Bengali language, we simply say that before we take to the use of English idioms in improving our language, it is advisable that we first employ the potentialities available to us in the Bengali language itself….

Those writers belonging to the Pundit class of whom we have spoken earlier are still productive in the literary field. The literature that they produce is still taken to be a part of Bengali literature. I have a few things to say about writers of this class. Of the shortcomings now evident in contemporary

Bengali literature, two are entirely missing from their writings. First, they do not use crude rustic expressions, and second, they do not take to synthetic Bengali modeled on the English language. These qualities apart, narrow provincialism too is rarely visible in their writings. Such factors contribute to make their language pure, ideal, and cast in a national mold. But here is one major problem with their style of writing and that is the excessive use of lengthy, uncommon, and difficult words or expressions. This makes their language unintelligible to even the educated, not to speak of the common man … such language cannot be instructive for the community as a whole and this prevents us from considering it as ideal literature. Like the synthetic Bengali written by the English educated, this really does not have a real hold on the people….

On the whole, my worries are less about the Pundit class than with the emerging class of writers … We have noted how, in some instances, the Pundits have accepted the ways of the new class of writers and struck a constructive relationship with them. The English educated do not harbor the obscure views or prejudices that the Pundits are likely to hold; on the other hand, it is they who have introduced certain forms of narrowness and sectarianism into our literature. They have turned quite unmindful of the needs of the common man and failed to grant literary creativity the respect that it deserves. The Pundit class is not self-willed and self-righteous in its approach to literary creation; the English educated are to a great extent. However, the foundation of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat has raised new hopes about just what the new writers are capable of delivering. After all, they have shown far greater support and enthusiasm for the Parishat than have the Pundits. It is, therefore, my fervent hope that they will resolutely work toward making the Parishat a successful venture in the literary world of Bengal.

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Gourmohan Addya (or Addy), 1805–1846, enterprising educator who started the Oriental Seminary in 1829 to promote secular, English-medium education among Hindu boys, free of evangelizing influences commonly found in schools run by missionaries. Many prominent figures associated with the Bengal Renaissance were educated in this school.
2 Editor's Note: Originally a Sanskrit classic translated into several India languages. In 1852, the educator, Vidyasagar, brought translation based on a Hindi language manuscript that he obtained from the North West Provinces and produced a Bengali translation.
3 Editor's Note: The reference here is to poem by Satyendranath Tagore (1842–1923), the first ICS officer of Indian origin. His poem was sung at the National Mela (also called the Hindu Mela) founded in 1867 by Nabagopal Mitra (1840–1894).
4 Editor's Note: It is reasonable guess that here Basu was mocking a gathering of Brahmos who were known to use expressions of this kind.

5 Editor's Note: Sir Antony Patrick McDonnell (1844–1925), Lt. Governor of Bengal between 1893 and 1895.
6 Editor's Note: Krishnarchacra Roy was ruler and rich landowner of Nadia in W. Bengal, between 1728 and 1782. A great patron of the arts and literature but conservative in his social views.
7 Editor's Note: Anandram Barooah (1850–1889), Sanskrit scholar and first statutory civilian to emerge from Assam.
8 Editor's Note: The Bengal Academy of Letters founded on 23 July 1893. Its library was inaugurated the next year in 1894.
9 Editor's Note: Cecil Bendall (1856–1906). Prominent Sanskrit scholar who came to India in search of manuscripts. Contrary to Basu's claims, Bendall served at University College, London, and subsequently, the University of Cambridge, and not Oxford.
10 Editor's Note: One of Bankimchanda Chatterjee's most popular novels, published in 1873. Partly translated by Bankim himself as *The Bane of Life* and gifted to Lady Charles Elliot. In 1884 Miriam S. Knight translated it as *The Poison Tree. A Tale of Hindu Life in Bengal*.

20

THOUGHTS ON BANKIM'S *ANANDAMATH*

*Dear Sir,

In this letter, I wish to take up for discussion your comments on the *Anandamath*[1]. Perhaps that will clear up matters between us. Needless to say, I have not viewed this work with the same eyes that you have; perhaps no two people are likely to do so. Hence, I am not quite sure if I have understood the manner in which you interpret this novel. This letter will serve the purpose of correcting any confusion that may have resulted from a wrong reading of the *Anandamath*.

The drama that unfolds in the *Ananadamath* is unrelated to domestic life: the work does not at all depict the everyday life of the Hindus. It depicts works and functions that common people do not ordinarily perform in daily life: the attempt to free the country through zealous and fiery patriotism. The principal characters in this novel appear incapable of any other work; as long as they appear before us they are seen engrossed in political work. The objective of freeing the country seizes their very imagination, aspirations, efforts, and thought. This patriotic project pervades is synonymous with their lives; that work represents their life's only mission. Now if a number of people take up such work as their life's mission, don't they all appear to unite as a single person? History bears this out amply. The citizens of Sparta made such work their life's goal and hence all Spartans looked as though

* Letter from Chandranath Basu to Rabindranath Tagore, dated Calcutta, 1 Kartik 1291 B.S (17? October 1884). Excerpted from Brajendranath Bandopadhyay: *Chandranath Basu, Nabakrishna Bhattacharya, Khetramohan Sengupta*. Calcutta. Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. 2nd ed. 1963: 22–24.

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they were but one person, one voice. At the altar of this grand National Objective, individual ideas or desires were summarily and promptly sacrificed. The chief objective before the Romans was military might and hence every single Roman reflected this collective ambition. It then began to appear as though the entire Rome was cast in a single mold. When Carthage was locked in a terrible war with Rome all of Carthage too appeared to be the same person, breathing the same air and pursuing a common interest. The chief motive before the English is mercantile success, and by virtue of that, all Englishmen appeared to be embodiments of brisk commerce …. The Ironsides[2] of Cromwell were all united as a body, with no individuality to separate them. Individuality progressively diminishes in a people united in a common vow. They then begin to resemble a regiment wherein men are distinguishable only by their names and numbers. It is therefore my understanding that if you take the characters in *Anandamath* too to be identifiable only by their names and numbers, then the common vow that they have undertaken has indeed succeeded and Bankim Babu's objectives have been truly secured. Further, there is a special feature that characterizes men with a common vow. It would appear as though the work that they perform originates not in their own will but in the command given by some other. The power that so motivates men to act has to be either a person or else an idea. What the citizens of Sparta performed were not acts that they performed of their own volition; a man named Lycurgus made them do these. Similarly, what Ironside soldiers did was not something that they themselves willed; a magician by the name of Cromwell persuaded them to do these. What the soldiers in Napoleon's army did was not at their own behest but on directions given by a magician by the name of Napoleon. Hindus carry out their routine domestic functions not as they understand these but under the spell of a magician by the name of Manu. What the Germans are presently doing is under the command of yet another magician called Bismarck. All grand work is performed by magicians who wield the magic wand, not by people themselves …. Hence, in my view, your understanding that the characters in the *Anandamath,* rather than act by themselves, are being driven by some magical power is indeed perceptive and reveals the reasons for the novel's success. Satyananda is no less than some miracle. Hannibal, Alexander, Cromwell, Napoleon, Mirabeau, Pericles, Lycurgus, Christ, the Buddha, Chaitanya, Manu are all magical figures. I read Satyananda's work as magical, and this leads me to say that *Anandamath* is a remarkable success.

But there is one other matter. Even though I consider *Anandamath* to be such a great success, I also feel that matters there are somewhat farfetched. That is because its plot is completely removed from man's everyday social life. Such work that a man does not ordinarily do and Bengali especially do not even dream of doing, will no doubt appear empty and unnatural to fellow Bengalis. On the other hand, the author of this novel is extremely

patriotic in his thoughts and liberating his country is a dream that he has passionately held for a long time. Hence, the storyline in *Anandamath* may not at all appear to be unrealistic or devoid of human interest. And when we begin to feel patriotic urges as strongly as he does, we will not find it devoid of human interest either. Even now, when I read this particular work of his as projected in his imagination I find much material that is of human interest. Under those conditions, the work and its author appear to me as the highest ideals placed before the Bengali people. And yet, it remains full of human interest. Is one's country not a matter of human interest?

There could have been no *Anandamath* without the character Shanti. Men cannot be valiant and patriotic unless women are so too. It is therefore that we have the character Shanti. Shanti is an ideal woman as were Durgavati,[3] Jayavati, and Mirabai.[4] However, *Anandamath* has a particular field of play and outside it, Shanti is not visible as Shanti. But what if this was to be the case? We must perceive various people in their various social roles and forms failing which we shall never get to understand social life in all its complexity. If it was our author's intention to depict Hindu domestic life in the novel, we would have no doubt found a domesticated Shanti. Had *Anandamath* been depicted as a domestic saga, we would have found in Shanti an extraordinarily captivating mix of boundless love, devotion to the husband, selflessness, friskiness, a sense of humor, and sprightliness as found in some of the other characters from his other novels. However, like you, I am apt to think that our author has sketched the character of Shanti somewhat unrealistically. I had pointed this out even at the time Bankim Babu had read out to me parts of the novel from his manuscript copy. But he paid no heed to my words. Perhaps his views on the matter did not match mine….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Bankimchandra's best known novel, published in 1882. Its popularity lies not so much in its literary merit as in the evocative use of Hindu nationalist thought and imageries. The novel contributed to the escalation of tension between Hindus and Muslims in colonial Bengal.
2 Editor's Note: Name given to the cavalry troops commanded by Oliver Cromwell during the English Civil War in the seventeenth century.
3 Rajput queen who ruled over Gondwana in the Vidarbha region of Maharashtra between 1560 and 1564.
4 Celebrated sixteenth century Rajput princess and mystic saint who composed and sang songs in praise of Lord Krishna.

21

THE PRODIGIOUS POET

*Dear Rabindranath,

I cannot keep up pace with you; movements are so very rapid, quick as lightning. Your talents know no bounds; they are as luminous as they are diverse. I stand quite overwhelmed. In four months you have produced four wonderful collections of poetry; *Kanika*,[1] *Katha*,[2] *Kalpana*,[3] and *Kshanika*,[4] how can I possibly match this? I have entirely failed in this respect. No sooner had I finished looking at your *Kanika*, there arrived *Katha*; once I became engrossed in your *Katha*, I could not do justice to *Kanika*. Likewise, your *Kalpana* drew away all my attention away from *Katha* and I could not enjoy that fully. Now that your *Kshanika* has startled me once again, I have not been able to return to your older works. I am an ordinary man and hence, my pace is slow and cannot keep up with your prodigious productivity. Though lagging behind, I remain wonderstruck at your talent and productivity. Your pace is lightning quick and the poetry as bright as it is beautiful. That pace and productive capacity is not earthly; it belongs to a higher cosmic level. Rabindranath, indeed it is not in my power to assess you!

The four works that I have cited above are all sweet, profound, soul-stirring, mellifluous, and at places, fine and penetrating. The picture of Bengali rural life that you paint in the *Kshanika* has simply mesmerized a man of the

* Letter from Chandranath Basu to Rabindranath Tagore. Dated Calcutta, 30 Sravan 1307 B.S (August 1900). Excerpted from Brajendranath Bandopadhyay: *Chandranath Basu*, *Nabakrishna Basu*, *Khetramaohan Sengupta*. Calcutta. Bangiya Sahitya Parishat. 2nd ed. 1963: 27–28

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countryside like me. I do not think that I have caught the fragrance of rural Bengal elsewhere to the same extent as I have done in *Kshanika*. Perhaps this springs from your association with Selaidaha.[5] The true fragrance of nature can be found only in the countryside.

Of which particular experiences shall I speak? I found the sweet rustic fragrance of nature at several places in your poems but that which I found in "Biraha"[6] beats them all….

I also noticed a marvelous quality about the *Kshanika*; it is as though the poem was a moment permanently etched in time. That is exactly why I thought your talent cannot be truly measured….

Notes

1 Editor's Note: Tagore's collection of poems published in 1899.
2 Editor's Note: Tagore's collection of poems and songs published in 1900 made a part of *Katha O Kahini*.
3 Editor's Note: Tagore's collection of poems published in 1900.
4 Editor's Note: Tagore's collection published in 1900.
5 Editor's Note: Ancestral house belonging to the Tagores built by Dwarkanath Tagore, presently located in district Kusthia, Bangladesh. Rabindranath spent a part of his life there between 1891 and 1901. His works *Katha O Kahini* and *Kshanika* were produced there.
6 A poem included in the collection *Kshanika*.

APPENDIX A

Chronology

1844, 31 August: birth of Chandranath Basu
1850 (possibly): admitted to village primary school
1852: arrives in Calcutta; student at Scottish Church School for six months
1852–1859: student at a local branch of the Oriental Seminary School
1860: admitted to Oriental Seminary Main School
1861: enters Presidency College upon clearing Entrance Examination
1863: clears First Arts Examination; secures fifth rank in the university
1864–1865: visits the Brahmo Samaj; admired Keshab Sen's oratory
1864?: edits Calcutta University Magazine with Syed Hossain Bilgrami's help; married to Mahalakshmi Devi
1865: clears B.A. examination, securing second position in the University
1866: clears M.A. examination in History securing top rank among those who obtained first class marks
1867: clears B.L. examination, securing second position
1867–1868: taught at Oriental Seminary
1868: made member of the Law Section of the Bengal Social Science Association; appointed Secretary to the Educational wing of the Association
1869: reads valuable paper titled *Present Social and Economic Condition of Bengal, presumably at the Bengal Social Science Association*
1870, 2 July: delivers address before the British Indian Association
1875–1876?: practices at the Calcutta High Court
1876, 26 July: speaks at the inaugural session of the Indian Association
1876: Secretary to the subcommittee appointed by the Indian Association to examine the Rnt Question; appointed Member of the Committee appointed by the Indian Association to prepare a Memorandum on the Statutory Civil Service; meets Bankimhandra at the College Reunion

1878, 25 April: reads paper before the Bethune Society on *Higher Education in India*
1878: works in the capacity of Deputy Magistrate for six months
1878: serves Maharaja's College at Jaipur
1879, October: joins the post of Librarian to Bengal Library; reviews Bankim's novel *Krishnakanter Will* for *The Calcutta Review*
1880: *Sakuntalatattva* serialized in the journal *Bangadarshan*
1882: elected Member of the Central Text Book Committee
1884?: attends lectures delivered by Pundit Sasadhar Tarkachudamani
1885: lecture on Hindu Marriages at the Oriental Seminary
1887, January: appointed Translator to the Bengal Government
1887, August: speaks at the Sovabazar Palace on the theme "Hindu Marriages"
1891: summoned as a Prosecution witness in the *Bangabasi* Sedition Case
1895: elected as Special Member of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat
1895: appointed Vice President of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishat; made Acting President for a period of six months
1896: appointed President of the Bangiya Sahitya Parishar
1901: death of eldest son, Pareshnath
1904: retired from service under government
1908: death of eldest daughter, Phulbala (Dulu)
1910, 20 June: death of Chandrnath Basu, his youngest son, Banku, predeceased him by a few months

APPENDIX B

Works of Chandranath Basu*

A. English

1. Critical Estimate of *Bichitrabirya* (1862) by Krishnakamal Bhattacharya (*Presidency College Magazine* (?)).
2. *On the Importance of the study of* History (*Calcutta University Magazine* 1864–1865).
3. *An Essay on the Life and Character of Oliver Cromwell*. Paper Read at the Theatre of the Presidency College, 23 February 1867.
4. *What is the best practicable method of educating Hindu women?* Included in *Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association*. Vol. II, Part I, 2nd ed. January 1868. Calcutta. Newman & Co. 1868, pp. 65–76.
5. *The Present System of Education in the University of Calcutta*. Paper read at the Bengal Social Science Association on 30 March 1868.
6. *Thoughts on the Present Social and Economic Condition of Bengal and Its Probable Future*. Included in the *Transactions of the Bengal Social* Science *Association*. 1869: p. 34.
7. *A Few Points Connected with the Registration of Assurance*. Included in *Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association,* 1870.

* Source: Karunamoy Majumdar: *Chandranath Basu. Jeebon O Sahitya*. Calcutta. GAE Publishers. 1984: 267–272; Brojendranath Bandopadhyay: Chandranath Basu, Nabakrishna Bhattacharya, Khetramohan Sengupta. In *Sahitya Sadhak Charitramala*, 3rd ed. 1962: 19–22. This list indicates the date of first publication of a work, For detais of the particular edition consulted see Select Bibliogphy.

8. *The Duke of Argyll on the Permanent Settlemet I Bengal. Calcutta Review* (187i). Details of volume and number not known.
9. *Some University Matters*. Included in *Transactions of the Bengal Social Science Association*, 1872.
10. *Political Economy and Famines in Bengal*. Published in the *Hindu Patriot*. 1874. Exact date not known.
11. *Durga Puja in my Boyhood*. *Oriental Miscellany* (October 1879). Appended to the work *Prithivir Sukha Dukkha*.
12. *The Partition Riddle*. Translated verion of the Bengali Partition Prahelika. 1906. pp. 19. To this an appendix called *The Partition Agitation.Explained by the author of The Partition Riddle*. 1906.
13. *England's Administration in India*. 1907. Other publishing details not known.

B. Bengali

1. *Novel baa Kavyagranther Uddeshya*. In *Bangdarshan*. Baisakh 1287 BS (April, 1880).
2. *Sakuntala Tattva*. 11 November 1881. pp. 151. Reprinted from the journal *Bangadarshan*.
3. *Pashupati Samvad (Aitihasik Upanyas)*. G.C. Basu & Co. 25 March 1884. pp. 62.
4. *Phul O Phol*. 15 May 1885. pp. 84. Essays reprinted from the journal *Bangadarshan*.
5. *Garhastha Paath*. Calcutta. Sanskrit Press Depository. 1886. pp.101.
6. *Garhastha Swasthabidhi*. Calcutta. Sanskrit Press Depository. 25 July, 1887. pp. 38.
7. *Hindu Vivaha*. Calcutta. Surendranath Mitra. 14 December 1887 pp. 54. Paper read at the eighth session of Savitri Library reprinted from the journal *Nabajeebon*.
8. *Tridhara*. 9 February 1891. pp. 151. Anthology of Essays.
9. *Hindutva*. *Hindur Prokrita Itihas*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 24 December 1892. pp. 405.
10. *Sahitya Pustak*. Calcutta. Kedarnath Basu. 1892. pp. 128.
11. *Kaa Pantha*. Calcutta. Gurudas Chattopadhyay. 1 May 1898. pp. 68. Expanded Version of the Addess delivered before the Savitri Library.
12. *Bartaman Bangla Sahityer Prokriti*. Calcutta. Medical Library. 20 July 1899. pp. 59.
13. *Savitritattva*. Calcuta. Gurudas Chattopadhyay. 5 July 1900. pp. 215.
14. *Betale Bahu Rahasya*. Calcutta. Metcalf Press. 12 June 1903. pp. 41. Paper read at the Chaitra 1309 BS session of the Sahitya Sabha.

15. *Sanjam Shikkha ba Nimnatam Sopan*. Calcutta. Student's Library. 20 September 1904. pp. 124. Anthology of Essays.
16. "Bandhubatsal Bankimchandra" in *Pradip* (Ashad 1305 BS/June–July, 1898.
17. *Prithivir Sukh Dukha*. Calcutta. Debendranath Bhattacharya. 16 March 1909. pp. 114+14. Autobiographical Essay. Reprinted from the *Sahitya Patrika*.
18. *Partition Prahelika*. Calcutta. Bengal Medical Library. n.d Reprinted from the *Bangabasi*. pp. 18.
19. *Chandrakana*. Calcutta. Students' Library. 1918.

The following essays by Basu were never incorporated in any compilation and are little known:

1. "Hindudharma Bishayak Alochana" in *Jahnavi*. Ashad 1291 BS /June–July 18854
2. Introduction to *Akkel Gudum* by Debendranath Bhattacharya. Calcutta. 1309BS/1902
3. Introduction to Prasanntara Gupta's *Paribarik Jeebon*. Cuttack. 1310BS/1903
4. "Uparnicher Milankatha" in *Bhandar* Sravan-Kartik 1312BS/1905

Note: Chandranath Basu (1844–1910) is not to be confused with his namesake who was active during the same period and is famed as the translator of several Sanskrit classics like the *Mahabharat* (in parts), *Kathasaritsagara*, *Adbhuta Ramayana*, and *Yogavasistha Ramayana*.

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